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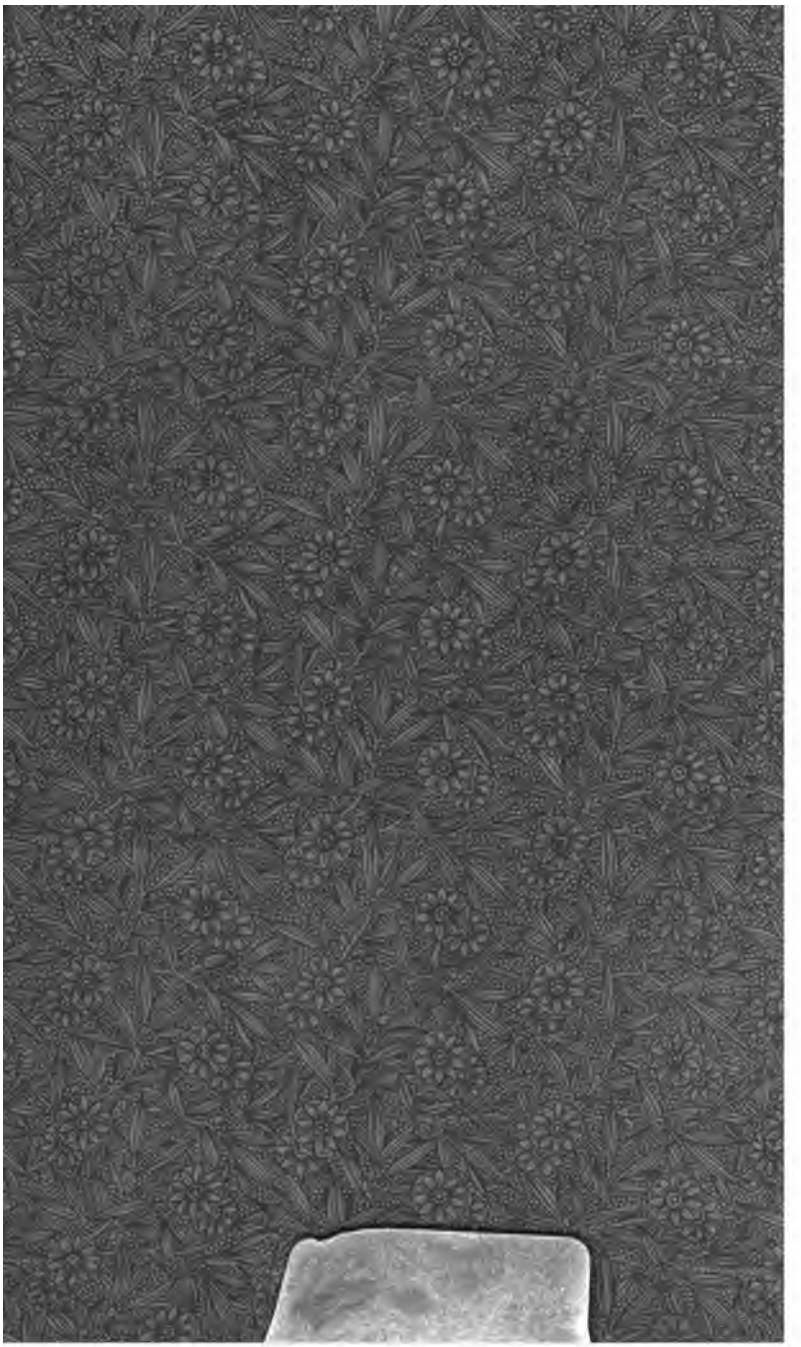
# THROUGH ONE ADMINISTRATION

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THAT LASS O'LOWRIES"



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# THROUGH ONE ADMINISTRATION.

VOL. II.

# THROUGH ONE ADMINISTRATION.

BY

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT,

AUTHOR OF "THAT LASS O' LOWRIE'S," "HAWORTH'S," "LOUISIANA," "A FAIR BARBARIAN," ETC. ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

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# THROUGH ONE ADMINISTRATION.

# THROUGH ONE ADMINISTRATION.

## CHAPTER I.

### JANEY'S ILLNESS.

At six o'clock in the morning, Bertha came down the stairs again. Her simple white gown was a fresh one, and there was a tinge of colour in her cheeks.

"She slept nearly all night," she said to Tredennis, when he joined her, "and so did I. I am sure she is better." Then she put out her hand for him to take. "It is all because you are here," she said. "When I wakened for a moment, once or twice, and heard your footsteps, it seemed to give me courage and make everything quieter. Are you very tired?"

"No," he answered, "I am not tired at all."

"I am afraid you would not tell me if you were," she said. "You must come with me now and let me give you some breakfast."

She led him into a room at the side of the hall. When the house had been a "mansion," it had been considered a very imposing apartment, and, with the assistance of a few Washingtonian luxuries which she had dexterously grafted upon its bareness, it was by no means unpicturesque even now.

"I think I should know that you had lived here," he said, as he glanced around.

"Have I made it so personal?" she replied. "I did not mean to do that. It was so bare at first, and, as I had nothing to do, it amused me to arrange it. Richard sent me the rugs and odds and ends, and I found the spindle-legged furniture in the neighbourhood. I am afraid it won't be safe for you to sit down too suddenly in the chairs, or to lean heavily on the table. I think you had better choose that leathern arm-chair and abide by it. It is quite substantial."

He took the seat, and gave himself up to the pleasure of watching her as she moved to and fro between the table and an antique

sideboard, from whose recesses she produced some pretty cups and saucers.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I am going to set the table for your breakfast," she said, "because Maria is busy with the children, and the other nurse is with Janey, and the woman of the house is making your coffee and rolls."

"You are going to set the table!" he exclaimed.

"It doesn't require preternatural intelligence," she answered. "It is rather a simple thing, on the whole."

It seemed a very simple thing as she did it, and a very pretty thing. As he leaned against the leathern back of his chair, beginning vaguely to realise by a dawning sense of weariness that he had been up all night, he felt that he had not awakened from his dream yet, or that the visions of the past months were too far away and too unreal to move him.

The early morning sunlight made its way through the vines embowering the window, and cast lace-like shadows of their swaying leaves upon the floor, and upon Bertha's dress when she passed near. The softness of the

light mellowed everything, and intensified the touches of colour in the fans and ornaments on the walls and mantel, and in the bits of drapery thrown here and there as if by accident, and in the midst of this colour and mellowed light Bertha moved before him, a slender, quiet figure, making the picture complete.

It was her quietness which impressed itself upon him more than all else. After the first moments, when she had uttered her cry on seeing him and had given way in her momentary agitation, he had noticed that a curious change fell upon her. When she lifted her face from the gate all emotion seemed to have died out of it; her voice was quiet. One of the things he remembered of their talk was that they had both spoken in voices so low as to be scarcely above a whisper.

When the breakfast was brought in, she took a seat at the table to pour out his coffee and attend to his wants. She ate very little herself, but he rarely looked up without finding her eyes resting upon him with wistful interest.

"At least," she said once, "I must see that you have a good breakfast. The kindest

thing you can do this morning is to be hungry. Please be hungry, if you can."

The consciousness that she was caring for him was a wonderful and touching thing to him. The little housewifely acts with which most men are familiar were bewilderingly new to him. He had never been on sufficiently intimate social terms with women to receive many of these pretty services at their hands. His unsophisticated reverence for everything feminine had worked against him, with the reserve which was one of its results. It had been his habit to feel that there was no reason why he should be singled out for the bestowal of favours, and he had perhaps ignored many through the sheer ignorance of simple and somewhat exaggerated humility.

To find himself sitting at the table, alone with Bertha in her new mood,—Bertha quiet and beautiful,—was a moving experience to him. It was as if they two must have sat there every day for years, and had the prospect of sitting so together indefinitely. It was the very simplicity and naturalness of it all which stirred him most. Her old vivid gaiety was missing; she did not laugh once, but her smile was very sweet. They talked

principally of the children, and of the common things about them, but there was never a word which did not seem a thing to be cherished and remembered. After a while, the children were brought down, and she took Meg upon her knee, and Jack leaned against her while she told Tredennis what they had been doing, and the sun creeping through the vines touched her hair and the child's, and made a picture of them. When she went up stairs, she took Meg with her, holding her little hand and talking to her in pretty maternal fashion, and after the two had vanished, Tredennis found it necessary to pull himself together with a strong effort, that he might prove himself equal to the conversational demands made upon him by Master Jack, who had remained behind.

"I will go and see Janey again," she had said. "And then, perhaps, you will pay her a visit."

When he went up, a quarter of an hour later, he found his small favourite touchingly glad to see him. The fever from which she had been suffering for several days had left her languid and perishable-looking, but she roused wonderfully at the sight of him, and

when he seated himself at her bedside, regarded him with adoring admiration, finally expressing her innocent conviction that he had grown very much since their last meeting.

"But it doesn't matter," she hastened to assure him, "because I don't mind it and mamma doesn't, either."

When in the course of the morning Doctor Wentworth arrived, he discovered him still sitting by the bedside, only Janey had crept close to him and fallen asleep, clasping both her small hands about his large one, and laying her face upon his palm.

"What!" said the doctor. "Can you do that sort of thing?"

"I don't know," answered Tredennis, slowly. "I never did it before."

He looked down at the small, frail creature, and the colour showed itself under his bronzed skin.

"I think she's rather fond of me—or something," he added with *naïveté*, "and I like it."

"She likes it, that's evident," said the doctor.

He turned away to have an interview with Bertha, whom he took to the window at the

opposite end of the room, and after it was over they came back together.

"She is not so ill as she was yesterday," he said, "and she was not so ill then as you thought her." He turned and looked at Bertha herself. "She doesn't need as much care now as you do," he said, "that's my impression. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Taking care of her," she answered, "since she began to complain of not feeling well."

He was a bluff, kindly fellow, with a bluff, kindly way, and he shook a big forefinger at her.

"You have been carrying her up and down in your arms," he said. "Don't deny it."

"No," she answered, "I won't deny it."

"Of course," he said. "I know you—carrying her up and down in your arms, and singing to her and telling her stories, and holding her on your knee when you weren't doing anything worse. You'd do it if she were three times the size."

She blushed guiltily, and looked at Janey.

"Good heaven!" he said. "You women will drive me mad! Don't let me hear any more about fashionable mothers who kill their

children! I find my difficulty in fashionable children who kill their mothers—and in little simpletons who break down under the sheer weight of their maternal nonsense. Who was it who nearly died of the measles?"

"But—but," she faltered, deprecatingly, "I don't think I ever had the measles."

"They weren't your measles," he said, with amiable sternness. "They were Jack's, and Janey's and Meg's, and so much the worse."

"But," she interposed, with a very pretty eagerness, "they got through them beautifully, and there wasn't a cold among them."

"There wouldn't have been a cold among them if you'd let a couple of sensible nurses take care of them. Do you suppose I'm not equal to bringing three children through the measles? It's all nonsense and sentiment, and self-indulgence. You like to do it, and you do it, and, as a natural consequence, you die of somebody else's measles—or come as near it as possible."

She blushed as guiltily as before, and looked at Janey again.

"I think she is very much better," she said.

"Yes," he answered, "she is better, and I

want to see you better. Who is going to help you to take care of her?"

"I came to try to do that," said Tredennis.

Bertha turned to look at him.

"You?" she exclaimed. "Oh, no! You are very good, but now the worst is over, I couldn't——"

"Should I be in the way?" he asked.

She drew back a little. For a moment she had changed again, and returned to the ordinary conventional atmosphere.

"No," she said, "you know that you would not be in the way, but I should scarcely be likely to encroach upon your time in such a manner."

The doctor laughed.

"He is exactly what you need," he said. "And he would be of more use to you than a dozen nurses. He won't stand any of your maternal weakness, and he will see that my orders are carried out. He'll domineer over you, and you'll be afraid of him. You had better let him stay. But you must settle it between you after I am gone."

Bertha went down stairs with him to receive a few final directions, and when she returned, Tredennis had gently released himself from

Janey, and gone to the window, where he stood evidently awaiting her.

"Do you know," he said, with his disproportionately stern air, when she joined him,—"do you know why I came here?"

"You came," she answered, "because I alarmed you unnecessarily and it seemed that some one must come, and you were kind enough to assume the responsibility."

"I came because there was no one else——" he began.

She stopped him with a question she had not asked before, and he felt that she asked it inadvertently.

"Where was Laurence Arbuthnot?" she said.

"That is true," he replied, grimly. "Laurence Arbuthnot would have been better."

"No," she said, "he would not have been better."

She looked up at him with a curious mixture of questioning and defiance in her eyes.

"I don't know why it is that I always manage to make you angry," she said; "I must be very stupid. I always know you will be angry before you have done with me. When we were down stairs——"

"When we were down stairs," he put in, hotly, "we were two honest human beings, without any barriers of conventional pretence between us, and you allowed me to think you meant to take what I had to offer, and then, suddenly, all is changed, and the barrier is between us again—because you choose to place it there, and profess that you must regard me, in your pretty, civil way, as a creature to be considered and treated with form and ceremony."

"Thank you for calling it a pretty way," she said.

And yet there was a tone in her low voice which softened his wrath somehow—a rather helpless tone, which suggested that she had said the words only because she had no other resource, and still must utter her faint protest.

"Is it for *me*," he went on, "to come to you with a civil pretence instead of an honest intention? I am not sufficiently used to conventionalities to make myself bearable. I am always blundering and stumbling. No one can feel that more bitterly than I do, but you have no right to ignore my claim to do what I can when I might be of use. I might be of use because the child is fond of me, and

in my awkward fashion I can quiet and amuse her as you say no one but yourself can."

"Will you tell me?" she asked, frigidly, "what right I have to permit you to make of yourself a—a nursemaid to my child?"

"Call it what you like," he answered. "Speak of it as you like. What right does it need? I came because——"

His recollection of her desolateness checked him. It was not for him to remind her again by his recklessness of speech that her husband had not felt it necessary to provide against contingencies. But she filled up the sentence.

"Yes, you are right," she said. "As you said before, there was no one else—no one."

"It chanced to be so," he said; "and why should I not be allowed to fill up the breach for the time being?"

"Because it is almost absurd," she said, inconsequently. "Don't you see that?"

"No," he answered, obstinately.

Their eyes met, and rested upon each other.

"You don't care?" she said.

"No."

"I knew you wouldn't," she said. "You never care for anything. That is what I like in you,—and dread."

"Dread?" he said; and in the instant he saw that she had changed again. Her cheeks had flushed, and there was upon her lips a smile, half-bitter, half-sweet.

"I knew you would not go," she said, "as well as I knew that it was only civil in me to suggest that you should. You are generous enough to care for me in a way I am not quite used to—and you always have your own way. Have it now—have it as long as you are here. Until you go away I shall do everything you tell me to do, and never once oppose you again—and—perhaps I shall enjoy the novelty."

There was a chair near her, and she put her hand against it as if to steady herself, and the colour in her face died out as quickly as it had risen.

"I did not want you to go," she said.

"You did not want me to go?"

"No," she answered, in a manner more baffling than all the rest. "More than anything in the world I wanted you to stay. There, Janey is awakening!"

And she went to the bed and kneeled down beside it, and drew the child into her arms against her bosom.

## CHAPTER II.

### IN ARCADIA.

FROM that day until they separated, there was no change in her. It was scarcely two weeks before their paths diverged again; but in looking back upon it afterwards, it always seemed to Tredennis that some vaguely extended length of time must have elapsed between the night when he dismounted at the gate in the moonlight, and the morning when he turned to look his last at Bertha, standing in the sun. Each morning when she gave him his breakfast in the old-fashioned room, and he watched her as she moved about, or poured out his coffee, or talked to Meg and Jack, who breakfasted with them; each afternoon when Janey was brought down to lie on the sofa, and she sat beside her singing pretty, foolish songs to her, and telling her stories; each evening

when the child fell asleep in her arms, as she sang; each brief hour, later on, when the air had cooled, and she went out to sit on the porch, or walk under the trees,—seemed an experience of indefinite length, not to be marked by hours, nor by sunrise and sunset, but by emotions. Her gentle interest in his comfort continued just what it had been the first day he had been so moved by it, and his care for her she accepted with a gratitude which might have been sweet to any man. Having long since established his rank in Janey's affections, it was easy for him to make himself useful in his masculine fashion. During her convalescence his strong arms became the child's favourite resting-place; when she was tired of her couch he could carry her up and down the room without wearying; she liked his long, steady strides and the sound of his deep voice, and his unconscious air of command disposed of many a difficulty. When Bertha herself was the nurse he watched her faithfully, and when he saw in her any signs of fatigue, he took her place at once, and from the first she made no protest against his quietly persistent determination to lighten her burdens. Perhaps, through

the fact that they were so lightened, or through her relief from her previous anxiety, she seemed to grow stronger as the child did. Her colour became brighter and steadier, and her look of lassitude and weariness left her. One morning, having been beguiled out of doors by Jack and Meg, Tredennis heard her laugh in a tone that made him rise from his chair by Janey, and go to the open window.

He reached it just in time to see her run like a deer, across the sun-dappled grass after a bright ball Meg had thrown to her, with an infantile aimlessness, which precluded all possibility of its being caught. She made a graceful dart at it, picked it up, and came back under the trees, tossing it in the air, and catching it again with a deft turn of hand and wrist. She was flushed with the exercise, and, for the moment, almost radiant; she held her dress closely about her figure, her face was upturned and her eyes were uplifted, and she was as unconscious as Meg herself.

When she saw him, she threw the ball to the children, and came forward to the window.

"Does Janey want me?" she asked.

"No. She is asleep."

"Do you want me?"

"I want to see you go on with your game."

"It is not my game," she answered, smiling. "It is Jack's and Meg's. Suppose you come and join them. It will fill them with rapture, and I shall like to look on."

When he came out she sat down under a tree leaning against the trunk, and watched him, her eyes following the swift flight of the ball high into the blue above them, as he flung it upward among the delighted clamour of the children. He had always excelled in sports and feats of strength, and in this simple feat of throwing the ball, his physical force and grace displayed themselves to decided advantage. The ball went up, as an arrow flies from the bow, hurtling through the air, until it was little more than a black speck to the eye. When it came back to earth he picked it up and threw it again, and each time it seemed to reach a greater height than the last.

"That is very fine," she said. "I like to see you do it."

"Why?" he asked, pausing.

"I like the force you put into it," she answered. "It scarcely seems like play."

"I did not know that," he said; "but I

am afraid I am always in earnest. That is my misfortune."

"It is a great misfortune," she said. "Don't be in earnest," with a gesture as if she would sweep the suggestion away with her hand. "Go on with your game. Let us be like children, and play. Our holiday will be over soon enough, and we shall have to return to Washington and effete civilisation."

"Is it a holiday?" he asked her.

"Yes," she answered. "Now that Janey is getting better, I am deliberately taking a holiday. Nothing rests me so much as forgetting things."

"Are you forgetting things?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, looking away, "everything."

Then the children demanded his attention, and he returned to his ball throwing.

If she was taking a holiday with deliberate intention, she did it well. In a few days Janey was well enough to be carried out and laid on one of the two hammocks swung beneath the trees, and then far the greater part of the day was spent in the open air. To Tredennis it seemed that Bertha made the most of every hour, whether she swung in her hammock with

her face upturned to the trees, or sat reading, or talking as she worked with the decorous little basket, at which she had jeered, upon her knee.

He was often reminded in these days, of what the Professor had said of her tenderness for her children. It revealed itself in a hundred trifling ways, in her touch, in her voice, in her almost unconscious habit of caring for them, and more than all, in a certain pretty inconvenient fashion they had of getting close to her, and clinging about her, at all sorts of inopportune moments. Once when she had run to 'comfort Meg who had fallen down, and had come back to the hammock, carrying her in her arms, he was betrayed into speaking:

"I did not think——" he began, and then he checked himself guiltily.

"You did not think?" she repeated.

He began to recognise his indiscretion.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I was going to make a blunder."

She sat down in the hammock with the child in her arms.

"You were going to say that you did not think I cared so much for my children," she said gently. "Do you suppose I did not

know that? Well, perhaps it was not a blunder. Perhaps it is only one of my pretences."

"Don't speak like that," he implored.

The next instant he saw that tears had risen in her eyes.

"No," she said. "I will not. Why should I? It is not true. I love them very much. However bad you are, I think you must love your children. Of course, my saying that I loved them might go for nothing; but don't you see," she went on with a pathetic thrill in her voice, "that they love *me*? They would not love me, if I did not care for them."

"I know that," he returned remorsefully. "It was only one of my blunders, as I said. But you have so bewildered me sometimes. When I first returned, I could not understand you. It was as if I found myself face to face with a creature I had never seen before."

"You did," she said. "That was it. Perhaps I never was the creature you fancied me."

"Don't say that," he replied. "Since I have been here, I have seen you as I used to dream of you, when I sat by the fire in my quarters in the long winter nights."

"Did you ever think of me like that?" she said slowly, and with surprise in her face.

He had not thought of what he was revealing, and he did not think of it now.

"I never forgot you," he said. "Never."

"It seems very strange—to hear that now," she said. "I never dreamed of your thinking of me—afterwards. You seemed to take so little notice of me."

"It is my good fortune," he said, with a touch of bitterness, "that I never *seem* to take notice of anything."

"I suppose," she went on, "that you remembered me because you were lonely at first, and there was no one else to think of."

"Perhaps that was it," he answered.

"After all," she said, "it was natural—only I never thought——"

"It was as natural that you should forget, as that I should remember," he said.

Her face had been slightly averted, and she turned it towards him.

"But I did not forget," she said.

"You did not?"

"No. At first, it is true, I scarcely seemed to have time for anything, but to be happy and enjoy the days, as they went by. Oh! what

bright days they were, and how far away they seem! Perhaps, if I had known that they would come to an end really, I might have tried to make them pass more slowly."

"They went slowly for me," he said. "I was glad when they were over."

"Were you so very lonely?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Would it have pleased you, if I had written to you when papa did?"

"Did you ever think of doing it?" he asked.

The expression dawning in her eyes was curious one—there was a suggestion of dread in it.

"Once," she replied. "I began a letter to you. It was on a dull day, when I was restless and unhappy for the first time in my life. And suddenly I thought of you, and I felt as if I should like to speak to you again. And I began the letter."

"But, you did not finish it."

"No. I only wrote a few lines, and then stopped. I said to myself that it was not likely that you had remembered me in the way I had remembered you, so I laid my letter aside. I saw it only a few days ago among some old papers in my trunk."

"You have it yet?"

"I did not know that I had it, until I saw it the other day. It seems strange that it should have lain hidden all these years, and then have come to light. I laid it away thinking I might find courage to finish it some time. There are only a few lines—but they prove that my memory was not so bad as you thought."

He had been lying on the grass a few feet away from her. As she talked he had looked not at her, but at the bits of blue sky showing through the interlacing greenness of the trees above him. Now he suddenly half rose and leaned upon his elbow.

"Will you give it to me?" he said.

"Do you want it? It is only a yellow scrap of paper."

"I think it belongs to me," he said. "I have a right to it."

She got up without a word and went towards the house, leading Meg by the hand. Tredennis watched her retreating figure in silence, until she went in at the door. His face set, and his lips pressed together, then he flung himself backwards and lay at full length again, seeing only the bright green of the leaves, and the bits of intense blue between.

It was well that he was alone. His sense of impotent anguish was more than he had strength to bear, and it wrung a cry from him.

"My God!" he said. "My God!" He was still lying so when Bertha returned. She had not been away many minutes, and she came back alone with the unfinished letter in her hand.

He took it from her without comment, and looked at it. The faint odour of heliotrope he knew so well, floated up to him as he bent over the paper. As she had said, there were only a few lines, and she had evidently been dissatisfied with these, and irresolute about them, for several words were erased as if with girlish impatience. At the head of the page was written first: *Dear Philip,* and then *Dear Captain Tredennis,* and there were two or three different opening sentences. As he read each one through the erasures, he thought he understood the innocent unconscious appeal in it, and he seemed to see the girl-face bending above it changing from eagerness to uncertainty, and from uncertainty to the timidity which had made her despair.

"I wish you had finished it," he said.

"I wish I had," she answered, and then she added vaguely—"if it would have pleased you."

He folded it, and put it in his breast pocket, and lay down once more, and it was not referred to again.

It seemed to Tredennis at least, that there never before had been such a day as the one which followed. After a night of rain the intense heat subsided, leaving freshness of verdure, skies of the deepest, clearest blue, and a balmy luxurious sweetness in the air, deliciously pungent with the odours of cedar and pine.

When he came down in the morning, and entered the breakfast-room, he found it empty. The sunlight streamed through the lattice work of vines, and the cloth was laid, with the pretty blue cups and saucers in waiting; but Bertha was not there, and fancying she had risen later than usual, he went out into the open air.

The next morning he was to return to Washington. There was no absolute need of his remaining longer. The child had so far recovered that, at the doctor's suggestion, in a few days she was to be removed to the sea-side. Nevertheless, it had cost him a struggle to arrive at his decision, and it had required resolution to announce it to Bertha. It would

have been far easier to let the days slip by as they would, and when he told her of his intended departure, and she received the news with little more than a few words of regret at it, and gratitude for the services he had rendered, he felt it rather hard to bear.

"If it had been Arbuthnot," he thought, "she would not have borne it so calmly." And then he reproached himself bitterly for his inconsistency.

"Did I come here to make her regret me, when I left her?" he said. "What a fool a man can make of himself, if he gives way to his folly."

As he descended the steps of the porch he saw her, and he had scarcely caught sight of her before she turned and came towards him. He recognised at once that she had made a change in her dress, that it was no longer such as she had worn while in attendance upon Janey, and that it had a delicate holiday air about it, notwithstanding its simplicity.

"Was there ever such a day before?" she said as she came to him.

"I thought not, as I looked out of my window," he replied.

"It is your last," she said. "And I should

like you to remember it as being pleasanter than all the rest, though," she added thoughtfully, "the rest have been pleasant."

Then she looked up at him, with a smile.

"Do you see my gala attire?" she said. "It was Janey who suggested it. She thinks I have not been doing myself justice, since you have been here."

"That," he said, regarding her seriously, "is a very beautiful gown, but—" with an entirely respectful sense of inadequacy of expression—"you always wear beautiful gowns, I believe."

"Did Mr. Arbuthnot tell you so?" she said—"or was it Miss Jessup?"

They breakfasted together in the sunny room, and after breakfast they rambled out together. It was she who led, and he who followed, with a curious dreamy pleasure in all he did, and in every beauty around him, even in the unreal passiveness of his very mood itself. He had never been so keenly conscious of things before, everything impressed itself upon him, the blue of the sky, the indolent sway of the leaves, the warmth of the air, and the sweet odours in it,

the broken song of the birds, the very sound of Bertha's light tread as they walked.

"I am going to give the day to you," she had said. "And you shall see the children's favourite camping-ground on the hill. Before Janey was ill, we used to go there almost every day."

Behind the house was a wood-covered hill, and half way up was the favoured spot. It was a sort of bower formed by the clambering of a great vine from one tree to another, making a canopy, under which, through a break in the trees, could be seen the most perfect view of the country below, and the bend of the river. The ground was carpeted with moss, and there was a moss-covered rock to lean against, which was still ornamented with the acorn cups and saucers with which the children had entertained their family of dolls on their last visit.

"See," said Bertha, taking one of them up when she sat down. "When we were here last we had a tea-party, and it was poor Janey's headache which brought it to a close. At the height of the festivities she laid down her best doll, and came to me to cry, and we were obliged to carry her home."

"Poor child," said Tredennis. He saw only her face upturned under the shadow of the white hat,—a pretty hat with small, soft downy plumes upon it, and a general air of belonging to the great world.

"Sit down," said Bertha, "or you may lie down, if you like, and look at the river, and not speak to me at all." He lay down, stretching his great length upon the soft moss, and clasping his hands beneath his head. Bertha clasped her hands about her knee and leaned slightly forward, looking at the view as if she had never seen it before.

"Is this a dream?" Tredennis said languidly, at last. "I think it must be."

"Yes," she answered, "that is why the air is so warm and fragrant, and the sky so blue, and the scent of the pines so delicious. It is all different when one is awake. That is why I am making the most of every second and am determined to enjoy it to the very utmost."

"That is what I am doing," he said.

"It is not a good plan, as a rule," she began, and then checked herself. "No," she said, "I won't say that. It is a worldly and Washingtonian sentiment. I will save it until next winter."

"Don't save it all," he said, "it is an unnatural sentiment. It isn't true, and you do not really believe it."

"It is safer," she said.

He lay still a moment, looking down the hill-side through the trees at the broad sweep of the river bend and the purple hills beyond.

"Bertha," he said, at last; "sometimes I hate the man who has taught you all this."

She plucked at the red-tipped moss at her side for a second or so before she replied, but she showed no surprise or hurry when she spoke.

"Laurence Arbuthnot!" she said. "Sometimes I hate him, too, but it is only for a moment—when he tells me the simple, deadly truth, and I know it is the truth, and wish I did not."

She threw the little handful of moss down the hill as if she threw something away with it.

"But this is not being happy," she said. "Let us be happy. I *will* be happy. Janey is better, and all my anxiety is over, and it is such a lovely day, and I have put on my favourite gown to celebrate it in. Look at the colour of the hills over there—listen to

those doves in the pines. How warm and soft the wind is, and how the scent of my carnations fills the air! Ah! what a bright world it is after all."

She broke into singing softly, and half under breath, a snatch of a gay little song. Tredennis had never heard her sing it before, and thought it wonderfully sweet. But she sang no more than a line or two, and then turned to him with a smile in her eyes.

"Now," she said, "it is your turn. Talk to me. Tell me about your life in the West—tell me all you did the first year, and begin—begin just where you left me, the night you bade me good-bye at the carriage door."

"I am afraid it would not be a very interesting story," he said.

"It would interest me," she answered. "There are camp fires in it, and scalps, and Indians, and probably war-paths." And, her voice falling a little, "I want to discover why it was that you always seemed to be so much alone,—and sat and thought in that dreary way by the fire in your quarters. It seems to me that you have been a great deal alone."

"I have been a great deal alone," he said, "that is true."

"It must have been so even when you were a child," she went on. "I heard you tell Janey once that, when you were her age, you belonged to no one. I don't like to think of that. It touches the maternal side of me. It makes me think of Jack. Suppose Jack belonged to no one, and you were not so old as Jack. I wonder if you were at all like him, and how you looked. I wish there was a picture of you, I could see."

He had never regarded himself as an object likely to interest in any degree, and had lost many of the consolations and excitements of the more personal kind thereby, and to find that she had even given a sympathetic thought to the far-away childhood whose desolateness he himself had never quite analysed, at once touched and bewildered him.

"I have not been without friends," he said, "but I am sure no one ever gave much special thought to me. Perhaps it is because men are scarcely likely to give such thought to men, and I have not known women. My parents died before I was a year old, and

I don't think any one was ever particularly fond of me. People did not dislike me, but they passed me over. I never wondered at it, but I saw it. I knew there was something a little wrong with me, but I could not understand what it was. I know now: I was silent, and could not express what I thought and felt."

"Oh!" she cried, "and was there no one to help you?"

There was no thought of him as a full-grown person in the exclamation, it was a womanish outcry for the child, whose desolate childhood seemed for the moment to be an existence which had never ended.

"I know about children," she said, "and what suffering there is for them if they are left alone. They can say so little, and we can say so much. Haven't I seen them try to explain things when they were at a disadvantage and overpowered by the sheer strength of some full-grown creature; haven't I seen them make their impotent little struggle for words and fail, and look up with their helpless eyes and see the uselessness of it, and break down into their poor little shrieks of wrath and grief. The happiest of

them go through it sometimes, and those who are left alone—— Why didn't some woman see and understand; some woman ought to have seen and cared for you."

Tredennis found himself absorbed in contemplation of her. He was not sure that there were not tears in her eyes, and yet he could hardly believe it possible.

"That is all true," he said, "you understand it better than I did. I understood the feeling no better than I understood the reason for it."

"I understand it because I have children," she answered. "And because I have watched them and loved them, and would give my heart's blood for them. To have children makes one like a tiger, at times. The passion one can feel through the wrongs of a child is something *awful*. One can feel it for any child—for all children. But for one's own——"

She ended with a sharply drawn breath. The sudden uncontrollable fierceness which seemed to have made her in a second, in her soft white gown and lace, and her pretty hat with its air of good society—a small, wild creature, whom no law of man could touch,

affected him like an electric shock; perhaps the thrill it gave him revealed itself in his look, and she saw it, for she seemed to become conscious of herself and her mood, with a start. She made a quick, uneasy movement and effort to recover herself.

"I beg your pardon," she said, with a half laugh. "But I couldn't help it. It was—" and she paused a second for reflection, "it was the primeval savage in me." And she turned and clasped her hands about her knee again, resuming her attitude of attention, even while the folds of lace on her bosom were still stirred by her quick breathing.

But though she might resume her attitude, it was not so easy to resume the calmness of her mood. Having been stirred once, it was less difficult to be stirred again. When he began, at last, to tell the story of his life on the frontier, if his vanity had been concerned he would have felt that she made a good listener. But his vanity had nothing to do with his obedience to her wish. He made as plain a story as his material would allow, and also made persistent, though scarcely successful, efforts to avoid figuring as a hero. He was, indeed, rather abashed to find, on

recurring to facts, that he had done so much to bring himself to the front. He even found himself at last taking refuge in the subterfuge of speaking of himself in the third person as "one of the party," when recounting a specially thrilling adventure in which he discovered that he had unblushingly distinguished himself. It was an exciting story of the capture of some white women by the Indians at a critical juncture, when but few men could be spared from the fort, and the fact that the deadly determination of "one of the party" that no harm should befall them, was not once referred to in words, and only expressed itself in daring and endurance, for which every one but himself was supposed to be responsible, did not detract from its force. This "one of the party," who seemed to have sworn a silent oath that he would neither eat nor sleep nor rest until he had accomplished his end of rescuing the captives, and who had been upon the track almost as soon as the news had reached the fort, and who had followed it night and day, with his hastily gathered and altogether insufficient little band, and at last had overtaken the captors, and through sheer courage and

desperate valour had overpowered them, and brought back their prisoners unharmed—this "one of the party," silent and would-be insignificant, was in spite of himself a figure to stir the blood.

"It was *you* who did that?" she said, when he had finished.

"I was only one of the company," he answered, abashed, "and obeyed orders. Of course a man obeys orders."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE END OF THE DREAM.

WHEN he took her hand to assist her to rise he felt it tremble in his own.

"It was not a pleasant story," he said. "I ought not to have told it to you."

They scarcely spoke at all as they descended. He did not understand his own unreasoning happiness. What reason was there for it, after all? If he had argued the matter, he was in the mood to have said that what he gained in the strange sweetness of the flying moments could only hurt himself, and was enough in itself to repay him for any sense of pain and loss which might follow. But he did not argue at all. In Laurence Arbuthnot's place he would scarcely have given himself the latitude he was giving himself now.

"It is safe enough for *me*," was the

sharp-edged thought which had cut through all others once or twice. "It is safe enough for *me* to be as happy as I may."

But he forgot this as they went down the hill, side by side. For the time being he only felt, and each glance he turned upon Bertha's downcast face gave him cause to realise what intensity his feelings had reached, and wakened him to that sudden starting of pulse and heart which is almost a pain. When they reached the house Bertha went in search of Janey. She remained with her for about half an hour, and then came out to the hammock with her work basket. The carnations at her waist were crushed a little, and something of the first freshness of her holiday air was gone. She held a letter in her hand which she had evidently been reading. She had not returned it to its envelope, and it was still half open.

"It is from Richard," she said, after she had taken her seat in the hammock. "It was brought in from the post-office at Lowville about an hour ago."

"From Richard?" he said. "He is coming home, I suppose."

"No," she answered, looking down at the

closely written sheets—"he is not coming yet. He was wise enough not to take a serious view of Janey's case. He is very encouraging, and expresses his usual confidence in my management."

There was nothing like bitterness in her voice, and it struck him that he had never seen so little expression of any kind in her face. She opened the letter and looked over the first page of it.

"He has a great many interesting things to say," she went on; "and he is very enthusiastic."

"About what?" Tredennis asked. She looked up.

"About the Westoria lands," she answered. "He finds all sorts of complications of good fortune connected with them. I don't understand them all by any means. I am not good at business. But it seems as though the persons who own the Westoria lands will be able to command the resources of the entire surrounding country—if the railroad is carried through: of course it all depends upon the railroad."

"And the railroad," suggested Tredennis, "depends upon——"

"I don't know," she replied. "On several people, I suppose. I wish it depended on me."

"Why?" said Tredennis.

She smiled slightly and rather languidly.

"I should like to feel that anything so important depended on me," she said. "I should like the sense of power. I am very fond of power."

"I once heard it said that you had a great deal of it," Tredennis said—"far more than most women."

She smiled again, a trifle less languidly.

"That is Laurence Arbuthnot," she observed. "I always recognise his remarks when I hear them. He did not mean a compliment exactly, either, though it sounds rather like one. He has a theory that I affect people strongly, and he chooses to call that power. But it is too trivial. It is only a matter of pleasing or displeasing, and I am obliged to exert myself. It does not enable me to bestow things, and be a potentate. I think that to be a potentate might console one for a great many things—and for the lack of a great many. If you can't take, it must distract your attention to be able to give."

"I do not like to hear you speak as if the

chief thing to be desired was the ability to distract one's self," Tredennis said.

She paused a second.

"Then," she said, "I will not speak so now. To-day I will do nothing you do not like." Then she added: "As it is your last day, I wish to retrieve myself."

"What have you to retrieve?" he asked.

"Myself," she answered, "as I said."

She spread the letter upon her lap, and gave her attention to it.

"Isn't it rather like Richard," she said, "that when he begins to write, he invariably writes a letter like that? Theoretically he detests correspondence, but when he once begins, his letter always interests him, and even awakens him to a kind of enthusiasm, so that instead of being brief he tells one everything. He has written twelve pages here, and it is all delightful."

"That is a wonderful thing to do," remarked Tredennis, "but it does not surprise me in Richard."

"No," she replied, "Richard can always interest himself; or, rather, he does not interest *himself*—it is that he is interested without making an effort; that is his strong point."

She replaced the letter in the envelope and laid it in the basket, from which she took a strip of lace-work, beginning to employ herself with it in a manner more suggestive of graceful leisure than of industrious intention. It seemed to accentuate the fact that they had nothing to do but let the day drift by in luxurious idleness.

But Tredennis could not help seeing that for a while the tone of her mood, so to speak, was lowered. And yet, curiously enough, nothing of his own dreamy exaltation died away. The subtle shadow which seemed to have touched her, for a moment, only intensified his feeling of tenderness. In fact, there were few things which would not have so intensified it; his mental condition was one which must advance by steady, silent steps of development to its climax. He was not by nature a reckless man, but he was by no means unconscious that there was something very like recklessness in his humour this last day.

As for the day itself, it also advanced by steady steps to its climax, unfolding its beauties like a perfect flower. The fresh rain-washed morning drifted into a warm, languorous noon, followed by an afternoon

so long and golden that it seemed to hold within itself the flower and sun, shade and perfume of a whole summer. Tredennis had never known so long an afternoon, he thought, and yet it was only lengthened by the strange delight each hour brought with it, and was all too short when it was over. It seemed full of minute details, which presented themselves to his mind at the time as discoveries. Bertha worked upon her lace, and he watched her, waiting for the moment when she would look up at him, and then look down again with a quick or slow droop of the lids, which impressed itself upon him as a charm in itself. There was a little ring she wore which made itself a memory to him—a simple turquoise, which set upon the whiteness of her hand like a blue flower. He saw, with a new sense of recognition, every fold and line of her thin, white drapery, the slight, girlish roundness of her figure, the dashes of brightness in the colour of her hair, the smallness of the gold thimble on her finger, her grace when she rose or sat down, or rested a little against the red cushions in her hammock, touching the ground now and then with her slender slipper and swaying lightly to and fro.

"Do you know," he said to her once, as watched her do this—"do you know," wi absorbed hesitation, "that I feel as if—as if had never really seen you until to-day—un this afternoon. You seem somehow to lo different."

"I am not sure," she answered, "that have ever seen you before—but it is n because you look different."

"Why is it?" he asked, quite ready relinquish any idea of his own in the pursu of one of hers.

She looked down a moment.

"To-day," she said, "I don't think y have anything against me."

"You think," he returned, "that I ha usually something against you?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Will you tell me what you think it is?"

"I do not need to tell you," she sai "You know so well—and it would rather hu me to put it into words."

"Hurt you?" he repeated.

"I should be harder than I am," sl returned, "if it had not hurt me to know myself—though I would not tell you that any other time than now.

"I dare say I shall repent it to-morrow," she said.

"No," he answered, "you won't repent it. Don't repent it."

He felt the vehemence of his speech too late to check it. When he ended, she was silent, and it was as if suddenly a light veil had fallen upon her face, and he felt that, too, and tried to be calmer.

"No," he repeated, "you must not repent. It is I who must repent that I have given you even a little pain. It is hard on me to know that I have done that."

The afternoon stretched its golden length to a sunset which cast deep, velvet shadows upon the grass and filled the air with an enchanted mellow radiance. Everything took a tinge of gold—the green of the pines and the broad-leaved chestnut trees, the gray and brown of their trunks, the red of the old house, the honeysuckle and Virginia creeper clambering about it, the birds flying homewards to their nests. When the rich clearness and depth of colour reached its greatest beauty, Bertha folded her strip of lace and laid it in the little basket.

"We ought simply to sit and watch this," she said. "I don't think we ought even to

speak. It will be all over in a few minutes, and we shall never see it again."

"No," said Tredennis, with a sad prescience; "nor anything at all like it."

"Ah!" was Bertha's rejoinder, "to *me* it has always seemed that it is not the best of such hours that one *does* see others like them. I have seen the sun set like this before."

"*I* have not," he said.

As he stood silent in the stillness and glow, a faint, rather bitter, smile touched his lips and faded out. He found himself, he fancied, face to face with Laurence Arbuthnot again. He was sharing the sunset with him—there were ten chances against one that he had shared the day with him also.

Bertha sat in the deepening enchanted light with a soft dreamy look. He thought it meant that she remembered something, but he felt that the memory was one to which she yielded herself without reluctance, or that she was happy in it. At last, she lifted her eyes to his, and their expression was very sweet in its entire gentleness and submission to the spell of the moment.

"See!" she said, "the sun has slipped behind

the pines already. We have only a few seconds left."

And then even as they looked at the great fire, made brighter by the dark branches through which they saw it—it sank a little lower, and a little lower, and with an expiring flame was gone.

Bertha drew a quick breath, there was a second or so of silence, and then she stirred.

"It is over," she said. "And it has been like watching some one die, only sadder."

She took up the little work-basket and rose from her seat.

"It seems a pity to speak of mundane things," she said, "but I think we must go in to tea."

When the children were taken up stairs for the night, Bertha went with them. It had been her habit to do this during their sojourn in the country, and naturally Janey had been her special care of late.

"I cannot often do such things when I am in Washington," she had explained once to Tredennis. "And I really like it as much as they do. It is part of the holiday."

As he sat on the porch in the starlight,

Tredennis could hear her voice mingling with the children's. The windows were wide open, she was moving from one room to the other, and two or three times she laughed in answer to some childish speech.

It was one of these laughs which, at last, caused Tredennis to leave his seat and go to the place under the trees, where the hammocks were swung, and which was far more the place of general rendezvous than the parlour windows. From this point he could see the corner of the brightly lighted room, near the window where it was Bertha's custom to sit in her low chair, and rock Janey to sleep when she was restless.

She was doing it to-night. He could see the child's head lying on her bosom, and her own bent so that her cheek rested against the bright hair. In a few moments all was quiet, and she began to sing, and as she sang, swaying to and fro, Tredennis looked and listened without stirring.

But though it was gay no longer, he liked to hear her song, and to his mind the moments in which he stood in the odorous dark looking upward at the picture framed by the vine-hung window were among the tenderest of the day. It was his fate to be full of a homely

sentiment, which found its pleasure in unsophisticated primary virtues and affections. Any deep passion he might be moved by would necessarily have its foundation in such elements. He was slow at the subtle analysis, whose final result is frequently to rob such simplicities of their value. His tendency was to reverence for age, tenderness to womanhood and childhood, faithfulness to all things. There was something boyish and quixotic in his readiness to kindle in defence of any womanly weakness or pain. Nothing he had ever said or done had so keenly touched and delighted Professor Herrick as his fiery denunciation one night of a man who was the hero of a scandalous story. There had been no qualifications of his sweeping assertion that in such cases it must be the man who had earned the right to bear the blame.

"It is *always* the man that is in the wrong," he had cried, flushing fiercely, "coward and devil. It is in the nature of things that he should be. Let him stand at the front and take what follows, if he has ever been a man for an hour?" And the Professor had flushed also—the fainter flush of age, and had given

some silent moments to reflection afterwards, as he sat gazing at the fire.

It was these primitive beliefs and sentiments which stirred within him now. He would not have lost one low note of the little song for the world, and he had left his seat only that he he might see what he saw now—her arm about her child, her cheek pressed against its hair.

It was not long before her little burden fell asleep he saw, but she did not rise as soon as this happened. She sat longer, and her song went on, finally dying away into brooding silence, which reigned for some time before she moved.

At length she lifted her face gently. She looked down at the child a few seconds, and slowly changed the position in which she lay, with an indescribably tender and cautious movement. Then she rose, and after standing an instant, holding her in her folding arms, crossed the room and passed out of sight.

Tredennis turned and began mechanically to arrange the cushions in the hammock. He felt sure she would come to-night and talk to him for a little while at least.

It was not very long before he recognised

her white figure in the doorway, and went towards it.

"They are all asleep," she said, in a voice whose hushed tone seemed to belong half to the slumber she had left and half to the stillness of the hour.

"Will you come out to the hammock?" he said, "or will you sit here?"

She came forward and descended the steps.

"I will sit in the hammock," she replied. "I like the trees above me."

They went down the path together, and reaching the hammock she took her usual seat among its cushions, and he his upon a rough rustic bench near her.

"I was thinking before you came," he said, "of what you said this afternoon of my having something against you. I won't deny that there has been something in my thoughts of you that often has been miserable, and you were right in saying it was not in them to-day. It has not been in them for several days. What I was thinking just now was that it could never be in them again."

She did not stir.

"Don't you see," he went on, "I can't go

back. If there had been nothing but to-day, I could not go back—beyond to-day. It would always be a factor in my arguments about you. I should always say to myself when things seemed to go wrong: 'There was no mistake about that day—she was real then,' and I should trust you against everything. To-day —and in the other days too—I have seen you as you are, and because of that, I should trust you in spite of everything."

"Oh!" she cried. "Don't trust me too much!" There was anguish in the sound and he recognised it.

"I can't trust you too much," he answered with obstinacy. "No honest human being can trust another honest human being too much."

"Am I an honest human being?" she said.

"I shall believe you one until the end," he returned.

"That is saying a great deal," was her reply.

"Listen," he said. "You know I am not like Arbuthnot and the rest. If I were to try to be like them, I should only fail. But though you have never told me that I could be of any use to you, and you never will, I shall know if the time should come—and I shall wait for it. Have we not all of us,

something that belongs to ourselves and not to the world—it may be a pleasure or a pain—it does not matter which ?"

"No," she put in, "it does not matter which."

"It does not matter to those on the outside," he went on, "it only matters to us, and I think we all have it to bear. Even I——"

"What," she said, "you, too ?"

"Yes," he answered, "I, too ; but it does not matter, if no one is hurt but ourselves."

"There are so many things that 'do not matter,'" she said. "To say that, only means that there is no help."

"That is true," was his reply, "and I did not intend to speak of myself, but of you."

"No," she said, "don't speak of me,—don't speak of me !"

"Why not ?" he asked.

"Because I tell you that you are trusting me too much."

"Go on," he said.

She had covered her face with her hands, and held them so for a little while, then she let them fall slowly to her lap.

"If I tell you the truth," she said, "it will not be my fault if you still trust me too

much. I don't want it to be my fault. The worst of me is that I am neither bad nor good, and that I cannot live without excitement. I am always changing and trying experiments. When one experiment fails, I try another. They all fail after a while, or I get tired of them."

"Poor child!" he said.

She stirred slightly; one of the flowers fell from her belt upon her lap, and she let it lie there.

"It does not matter," she answered. "All that matters is, that you should know the truth about me—that I am not to be depended upon, and that, above all, you need not be surprised at any change you see in me."

"When we meet again in Washington?" he suggested.

She hesitated a moment and then made her response.

"When we meet again in Washington, or at any time."

"Are you warning me?" he inquired.

"Yes," was her reply, and he recognised that in spite of her effort it was faintly given. "I am warning you."

He looked down at the grass and then at her. The determined squareness of chin, which was one of the chief characteristics of his face, struck her as being more marked than she had ever seen it.

"It is unnecessary," he said. "I won't profit by it."

He rose abruptly from his seat, and there was meaning in the movement, and in his eyes looking down upon her deep and dark in the faint light.

"You cannot change *me*," he said. "And you would have to change me before your warning would carry weight. Change yourself as you like—try as many experiments as you like—you cannot change the last ten days."

Even as the words were uttered, the day was ended for them as they had never once thought of its ending. There fell upon the quiet the sound of horses' feet approaching at a rapid pace and coming to a stop before the gate. The dogs came bounding and baying from the house, and above their deep-mouthed barking a voice made itself heard calling to some one to come out—a voice they both knew.

Tredennis turned towards it with a sharp movement.

"Do you hear that?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Bertha; and suddenly her manner was calm almost to coldness; "it is Laurence Arbuthnot, and papa is with him. Let us go and meet them."

And in a few seconds they were at the gate and the Professor was explaining their unexpected appearance.

"It is all Mr. Arbuthnot's fault, my dear," he said; "he knew that I wished to see you, and having an idea that I was not strong enough to make the journey alone, he suddenly affected to have business in this vicinity. It was entirely untrue, and I was not in the least deceived, but I humoured him, as I begin to find it best to do, and allowed him to bring me to you."

Arbuthnot had dismounted and was fastening his horse to the gate, and he replied by one of the gayest and most discriminatingly pitched of the invaluable laughs.

"It is no use," he said; "the Professor does not believe in me. He refuses to recognise in me anything but hollow mockery."

Bertha went to him. There was something

hurried in her movement; it was as if she was strangely, almost feverishly, glad to see him. She went to his horse's head and laid her hand on the creature's neck.

"That takes me back to Washington," she said—"to Washington. It was like you to come, and I am glad, but—you should have come a little sooner."

And as she stood there, faintly smiling up at him, her hand was trembling like a leaf.

## CHAPTER IV.

### NEW YEAR'S DAY.

It was New Year's day, and his Excellency, the President, had had several months in which to endeavour to adjust himself to the exigencies of his position, though whether he had accomplished this with a result of entire satisfaction to himself and all parties concerned and unconcerned had, perhaps unfortunately, not been a matter of record. According to a time-honoured custom, he had been placed at the slight disadvantage of being called upon to receive from time to time the opinions of the nation concerning himself without the opportunity of expressing, with any degree of publicity, his own opinions regarding the nation, no bold spirit having as yet suggested that such a line of procedure might at least be embellished with the advantage of entire

novelty, apart from the possibility of its calling forth such originality and force of statement as would present to the national mind questions never before discussed, and perhaps not wholly unimportant. All had, however, been done which could be done by a nation justly distinguished for its patriotic consideration for, and courtesy towards, the fortunate persons elevated to the position of representing its dignity at home and abroad. Nothing which could add to that dignity had been neglected—no effort which could place it in its proper light, and remove all difficulty from the pathway of the figure endeavouring creditably to support it, had been spared. The character of the successful candidate for presidential office having been, during the campaign, effectually disposed of—his morals having been impugned, his honour rent to tatters, his intellectual capacity pronounced far below the lowest average—united good feeling was the result, and there seemed little more to attain. His past had been exhausted. Every event of his political career and domestic life had been held up to public derision, laudation, and criticism. It had been successfully proved that his education

had been entirely neglected, and that his advantages had been marvellous; that he had read Greek at the tender age of four years, and that he had not learned to read at all until he attained his majority; that his wife had taught him his letters, and that he had taught his wife to spell; that he was a liar, a forger, and a thief; that he was a model of virtue, probity, and honour—each and all of which incontrovertible facts had been public property and a source of national pride and delight.

After the election, however, the fact that he had had a past at all had ceased to be of any moment whatever. A future—of four years—lay before him, and must be utilised: after that, the Deluge. The opposing party sneered, vilified, and vaunted themselves in the truth of their predictions concerning his incapacity; the non-opposing party advised, lauded, cautioned, mildly discouraged, and in a most human revulsion of feeling showed their unprejudiced frankness by openly condemning on frequent occasions. The head of the nation having appointed an official from among his immediate supporters, there arose a clamour of adverse criticism upon a course

which lowered the gifts of his sacred office to the grade of mere payment for value received. Having made a choice from without the circle, he called down upon himself frantic accusations of ingratitude to those whom he owed all. There lay before him the agreeable alternatives of being a renegade or a monument of bribery and corruption, and if occasionally these alternatives lost for a moment their attractiveness, and the head of the nation gave way to a sense of perplexity, and was guilty of forming in secret a vague wish that the head of the nation was on some other individual's shoulders, or even went to the length of wishing that the head upon his own shoulders was his own property, and not a foot-ball for the vivacious strength of the nation to expend itself upon—if this occurred —though it is by no means likely—it certainly revealed a weakness of character and inadequacy to the situation which the nation could not have failed to condemn. The very reasonable prophecy—made by the party whose candidate had not been elected—that the Government must inevitably go to destruction and the country to perdition, had, through some singular oversight on the part

of the powers threatened, not been fulfilled. After waiting in breathless suspense for the occurrence of these catastrophes, and finding they had apparently been postponed until the next election, the Government had drawn a sigh of relief, and the country had gained courage to bestir itself cheerfully, with a view to such perquisites as might be obtained by active effort and a strong sense of general personal worthiness and fitness for any position.

There had descended upon the newly elected ruler an avalanche of seekers for office, a respectable number of whom laid in his hands the future salvation of their souls and bodies and generously left to him the result. He found himself suddenly established as the guardian of the widow, the orphan, and the friendless, and required to repair fortunes or provide them, as the case might be, at a moment's notice; his sympathies were appealed to, his interests, his generosity as an altogether omnipotent power in whose hands all things lay, and whose word was naturally law upon all occasions, great or small; and any failure on his part to respond to the entirely reasonable requests preferred was very properly laid

to a tendency to abandoned scheming or to the heartless indifference of the great—which decision disposed of all difficulties in the argument, apart from such trivial ones as were left to the portion of the delinquent and were not referred to. Being called upon in his selection of his cabinet to display the judgment of Solomon, the diplomacy of Talleyrand, and the daring of Napoleon, and above all to combine like powers in each official chosen, he might have faltered but for the assistance proffered him from all sides. This, and the fact that there was no lack of the qualifications required, supported him. Each day some monument of said qualifications, and others too numerous to mention, was presented to his notice. To propitiate the South it was suggested that he should appoint A——; to secure the North, B——; to control the East, C——; to sweep the West, D——; and to unite the country, E——. Circumstances having finally led him to decide upon G——, the Government appeared to be in jeopardy again, but—possibly through having made use of its numerous opportunities of indulging in acrobatic efforts in the direction of losing its

balance and regaining it again in an almost incredible manner—it recovered from the shock and even retained its equilibrium upon finding itself in the end saddled with a cabinet whose selection was universally acknowledged to be a failure when it was not denounced as a crime.

On this particular New Year's day, there were few traces on the social surface of the disasters which so short a time before had threatened to engulf all. Washington wore an aspect even gayer than usual. The presidential reception began the day in its most imposing manner. Lines of carriages thronged the drive before the White House, and the diplomatists, statesmen, officials, and glittering beings in naval and military uniforms who descended from them were possibly cheered and encouraged by the comments of the lookers-on, who knew them and their glories and their short-comings by heart. The comments were not specially loud, however. That which in an English crowd takes the form of amiable or unamiable clamour, in an American gathering of a like order resolves itself into a serene readiness of remark, which exalts or disposes of a dignitary with equal

impartiality, and an ingenuous fearlessness of any consequence whatever, which would seem to argue that all men are born free and some equal, though the last depends entirely upon circumstances. Each vehicle, having drawn up, deposited upon the stone steps of the broad portico a more or less picturesque or interesting personage. Now it was the starred and ribboned representative of some European court; again, a calm-visaged Japanese or Chinese official, in all the splendour of flowing robes and brilliant colour; and again a man in citizen's clothes, whose unimposing figure represented such political eminence as to create more stir among the lookers-on than all the rest. Among equipages, there drove up at length a rather elegant little *coupé*, from which, when its door was opened, there sprang lightly to the stone steps the graceful figure of a young man, followed by an elder one. The young fellow, who was talking with much animation, turned an exhilaratingly bright face upon the crowd about him.

"On the whole, I rather like it," he said.

"Oh!" responded his companion, "as to that you like everything. I never saw such a fellow."

The younger man laughed quite joyously.

"There is a great deal of truth in that," he said, "and I don't suppose you will deny that it is an advantage."

"An advantage!" repeated the other. "By Jupiter, I should think it was an advantage! Now, how long do you think this fellow will keep us waiting when we want him?"

"Oh," was the answer, "he is Mrs. Amory's coachman, you know, and there isn't a doubt that he has had excellent training. She isn't fond of waiting."

"No," said the other, with a peculiar smile. "I should fancy she wasn't. Well, I guess we'll go in."

They turned to do so, and found themselves near a tall man in uniform, who almost immediately turned also and revealed the soldierly visage of Colonel Tredennis.

He made a quick movement forward, which seemed to express some surprise.

"What, Amory!" he exclaimed. "You here too? I was not at all sure that you had returned."

"I am scarcely sure myself yet," answered Richard, as he shook hands. "It only happened last night, but Bertha has been home a week. Is it possible you haven't seen her?"

"I have not seen anybody lately," said Tredennis, "and I did not know that she had returned until I read her name in the list of those who would receive."

"Oh, of course she will receive," said Richard. "And Planefield and I—you have met Senator Planefield?"

"How do you do?" said Senator Planefield, without any special manifestation of delight.

Tredennis bowed, and Richard went on airily, as they made their way in:

"Planefield and I have been sent out to do duty, and our list extends from Capitol Hill to Georgetown Heights."

"And he," said Senator Planefield, "professes to enjoy the prospect."

"Why not?" said Richard. "It is a bright, bracing day, and there is something exhilarating in driving from house to house, to find oneself greeted at each by a roomful of charming women—most of them pretty, some of them brilliant, all of them well dressed and in holiday spirits. It is delightful."

"Do *you* find it delightful?" inquired Planefield, turning with some abruptness to Tredennis.

"I am obliged to own that I don't shine in society," answered Tredennis.

He knew there was nothing to resent in the question, but he was conscious of resenting something in the man himself. His big, prosperous-looking body and darkly florid face, with its heavy, handsome outlines and keen bold eyes, had impressed him unpleasantly from the first, and on each occasion of their meeting the impression seemed to deepen.

"Well, Amory shines," was his response, "and so does Mrs. Amory. We are to drop in and see her shine, as often as we happen to be in the neighbourhood through the day."

They had reached the threshold of the reception room by this time, and Richard, catching the last words, turned and spoke.

"Of course you will be there yourself in the course of the day," he said. "We shall possibly meet you—and, by the by, you will see Mrs. Sylvestre. She arrived two days ago."

When they came out again, Richard was in more buoyant spirits than before. The lighted rooms, the brilliant dresses, the many faces he knew or did not know, the very crush itself had acted upon him like a fine wine.

He issued forth into the light of day again, girded and eager for his day's work.

"There is nothing like Washington," he announced, "and especially nothing like Washington at the beginning of the season. Just at the outset, when one is meeting people for the first time since their return, they actually have the air of being glad to see one, and a man has a delightful evanescent sense of being somehow positively popular."

"Does it make *you* feel popular?" demanded Planefield of Tredennis, in his unceremonious fashion.

Tredennis presented to him an entirely immovable front.

"How do *you* find it?" he inquired.

The man laughed.

"Not as Amory does," he answered.

When the *coupé* appeared and he took his place at Richard's side, he bent forward to bestow on Tredennis, as they drove away, a glance expressive of but little favour.

"I don't like that fellow," he said. "Confound him!"

Richard settled himself in his corner of the carriage, folding his fur-trimmed coat about him quite luxuriously.

"Oh, no. Not confound him," he replied. "He is a delightful fellow—in his way."

"Confound his way, then," responded Planefield. "There's too much of it."

Richard leaned slightly forward to look at the tall, motionless figure himself, and the faintest possible change passed over his face as he did so.

"He is not exactly a malleable sort of fellow," he remarked, "and I suppose there might arise occasions when he would be a little in the way—but there is no denying that he is picturesque."

"Oh!" exclaimed his companion, with more fervour than grace. "The devil take his picturesqueness!"

In the meantime Colonel Tredennis awaited the arrival of his own carriage, which had fallen back in the line. The surging of the crowd about him, the shouts of the policemen as they called up the vehicles, the rolling of vehicles and opening and shutting of doors, united themselves in an uproar which seemed to afford him a kind of seclusion. The subject of his thoughts as he stood in the midst of the throng was not a new one; it was one from whose presence he had ceased to expect to free himself; but as the information in the

morning paper had accelerated the pulse of emotion in him, so his brief interview with Richard Amory had quickened it again. Since the day when he had left her in Virginia, five months before, he had not seen Bertha at all, and had only heard from her directly once. She had been at Long Branch, Saratoga, Newport, and afterwards visiting friends in the Northern cities. After his return from the West, Richard had frequently been with her, and their letters to the professor had informed him that they were well and were involved in a round of gaieties.

How the time had passed for Tredennis he could not himself have told. When he had returned to Washington, he had lived and moved as a man in a dream. The familiar streets and buildings wore an unfamiliar look. It was a relief to find the places more deserted than before; his chief desire was to be, if possible, entirely alone. In the first vivid freshness of his impressions it seemed incredible that the days he had been living through had come to an end, and that absolutely nothing remained but the strange memory of them. At times it appeared that something must happen—some impossible thing which would

give reality to the past and motive to the future. If in any of his nightly walks before the closed and silent house he had suddenly seen that the shutters were opened and lights were shining within—if Bertha herself had, without warning, stood at the window and smiled upon him, he would have felt it at first only natural, even though he knew she was hundreds of miles away.

This for a few weeks, and then his exaltation died a gradual death for want of sustenance, and there remained only the long, sultry days to be lived through and their work to be done. They were lived through and their work was not neglected, but there was no one of them which dragged its slow length by without leaving marks upon him which neither time nor change could erase in any future that might come.

"Five months," he said, as he waited with clamour about him, "is longer than it seems—it is longer."

And Miss Jessup, passing him at the moment and looking up, found herself so utterly at a loss for an adjective adequate to the description of his expression, that her own bright and alert little countenance fell, and existence temporarily palled upon her.

It was late in the day when he reached the Amorys. When he drove up several carriages stood before the door, one of them Bertha's own, from which Richard and Planefield had just descended. Two or three men were going into the house, and one or two were leaving it. Through the open door was to be seen the lighted hall and glimpses of bright rooms beyond, from which came the sound of voices, laughter, and the clink of glass.

Richard entered the house with Tredennis, and flung off his rather sumptuous outer garment with a laugh of relief.

"We have made fifty calls so far," he said, "and have enjoyed them enormously. What have you accomplished?"

"Not fifty by any means," Tredennis answered, and then the man-servant took his coat, and they went into the parlours.

They seemed to be full of men—young men, middle-aged men, old men; even a half-grown boy or two had timorously presented themselves, with large hopes of finding dazzling entertainment in the convivialities of the day. The shutters were closed and the rooms brilliantly alight; there were flowers in every available corner, and three or four charmingly

dressed women, each forming a bright central figure in a group of black coats, gave themselves to their task of entertainment with delightful animation.

For a moment Tredennis stood still. He did not see Bertha at once, though he fancied he heard her voice in the room adjoining, where through the half-drawn *portières* were to be seen men standing, with coffee-cups, wine-glasses, or little plates in their hands, about a table bright with flowers, fruits, and all the usual glittering appurtenances. The next instant, amid a fresh burst of laughter, which she seemed to leave behind her, she appeared upon the threshold.

As she paused a second between the heavy curtains, Tredennis thought suddenly of a brilliant tropical bird he had seen somewhere, and the fancy had scarcely formed itself in his mind before she recognised him and came forward.

He had never seen her so brilliantly dressed before. The wonderful combination of rich and soft reds in her costume, the flash of the little jewelled bands clasped close about her bare throat and arms, their pendants trembling and glowing in the light, the colour on her

cheeks, the look in her eyes, had a curiously bewildering effect upon him. When she gave him her hand he scarcely knew what to do with it, and could only wait for her to speak. And she spoke as if they had parted only an hour ago.

"At last," she said. "And it was very nice in you to leave me until the last, because now I know you will not feel obliged to go away so soon." And she withdrew her hand and opened her fan, and stood smiling up at him over its plumy border. "You see," she said, "that we have returned to our native atmosphere and may begin to breathe freely. Now we are real creatures again."

"Are we?" he answered. "Is that it?" and he glanced over the crowd, and then came back to her and looked her over from the glittering buckle on her slipper to the scintillating arrow in her hair. "I suppose we have," he added. "I begin to realise it."

"If you need anything to assist you to realise it," she said, "cast your eye upon Mr. Arbuthnot and I think you will find him sufficient; for me, everything crystallised itself and all my doubts disappeared the moment I saw his opera hat, and heard his first remark

about the weather. It is a very fine day," she added, with a serene air of originality, "a little cold, but fine and clear. Delightful weather for those of you who are making calls. It has often struck me that it must be unpleasant to undertake so much when the weather is against you. It is colder to-day than it was yesterday, but it will be likely to be warmer to-morrow. It is to be hoped that we shall have an agreeable winter."

"You might," he said, looking at her over the top of her fan, "induce them to mention it in the churches."

"That," she answered, "is the inspiration of true genius, and it shall be attended to at once, or—here is Senator Planefield: perhaps he might accomplish something by means of a bill?"

The Senator joined them in his usual manner, which was not always an engaging manner, and was at times a little suggestive of a disposition to appropriate the community, and was also a somewhat loud-voiced manner, and florid in its decorative style. It was, on the whole, less engaging than usual upon the present occasion. The fact that he was for some reason not entirely at ease expressed itself in his appearing

to be very wonderfully at ease; indeed, metaphorically speaking, he appeared to have his hands in his pockets.

"A bill!" he said. "You have the floor, and I stand ready to second any motion you choose to make. I think we might put it through together. What can we do for you?"

"We want an appropriation," Bertha answered, "an appropriation of fine weather, which will enable Colonel Tredennis to be as giddy a butterfly of fashion as his natural inclination would lead him to desire to be."

Planefield glanced at Tredennis with a suggestion of grudging the momentary attention.

"Is *he* a butterfly of fashion?" he asked.

"What!" exclaimed Bertha, "is it possible that you have not detected it? It is the fatal flaw upon his almost perfect character. Can it be that you have been taking him seriously, and mistakenly imagining that it was Mr. Arbuthnot that was frivolous?"

"Arbuthnot!" repeated the Senator. "Which is Arbuthnot? How is a man to tell one from the other? There are too many of them!"

"What an agreeable way of saying that Colonel Tredennis is a host in himself!" said

Bertha. "But I have certainly not found that there were too many of him, and I assure you that you would know Mr. Arbuthnot from the other after you had exchanged remarks with him. He has just been beguiled into the next room by Mrs. Sylvestre, who is going to give him some coffee."

"Mrs. Sylvestre," said Tredennis. "Richard told me she was with you, and I was wondering why I did not see her."

"You did not see her," said Bertha, "because I wished her to dawn upon you slowly, and having that end in view, I arranged that Mr. Arbuthnot should occupy her attention when I saw you enter."

"He couldn't stand it all at once, could he?" remarked Planefield, whose manner of giving *her* his attention was certainly not grudging. He kept his eyes fixed on her face, and apparently found entertainment in her most trivial speech.

"It was not that, exactly," she answered. Then she spoke to Tredennis.

"She is ten times as beautiful as she was," she said, "and it would not be possible to calculate how many times more charming."

"That was not necessary," responded Tredennis.

He could not remove his own eyes from her face, even while he was resenting the fact that Planefield looked at her; he himself watched her every movement and change of expression.

"It was entirely unnecessary," she returned, "but it is the truth."

"You are trying to prejudice him against her," said Planefield.

"She is my ideal of all that a beautiful woman ought to be," she replied, "and I should like to form myself upon her."

"Oh, we don't want any of that," put in Planefield. "You are good enough for us."

She turned her attention to him. Her eyes met his with the most ingenuous candour, and yet the little smile in them was too steady not to carry suggestion with it.

"Quite?" she said.

"Yes, quite," he answered—not so entirely at ease as before.

Her little smile did not waver in the least.

"Do you know," she said, "it seems almost incredible, but I will try to believe it. Now," she said to Tredennis, "if Senator Planefield will excuse me for a moment, I will take you

into the other room. You shall speak to Mrs. Sylvestre. He has already seen her. Will you come?"

"I shall be very glad," he answered. He followed as she led him to the adjoining room. On its threshold she paused an instant.

"Exactly as I expected," she said. "She is listening to Mr. Arbuthnot."

Mr. Arbuthnot was standing at the end of the low mantel. He held a cup of coffee in his hand, but had apparently forgotten it in giving his attention to his very charming companion. This companion was of course Mrs. Sylvestre herself. Tredennis recognised her clear, faintly tinted face and light, willowy figure at once. She wore a dress of black lace with purple passion flowers, and she was looking at Arbuthnot with reflective eyes almost the colour of the flowers. She did not seem to be talking herself, but she was listening beautifully with a graceful receptive attention. Arbuthnot evidently felt it, and was improving his shining hour with a sense of enjoyment tempered by no lack of ability to avail himself of its fleeting pleasure.

It is possible, however, that his rapture at seeing Tredennis may have been tempered by

the natural weakness of man, but he bore himself with his usual unperturbed equanimity.

"There," he remarked to Mrs. Sylvestre, "is the most objectionable creature in Washington."

"Objectionable!" Mrs. Sylvestre repeated. "Bertha is bringing him here."

"Yes," responded Arbuthnot, "that is the objection to him, and it leaves him without a redeeming quality."

Mrs. Sylvestre gave him a charmingly interested glance and the next instant made a slight movement forward.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "it is Colonel Tredennis!" and she held out her hand with the most graceful gesture of welcome imaginable.

"It is very good of you to remember me," Tredennis said.

"It was not difficult," she answered, with a smile. And they fell, in the most natural manner, a step apart from the others, and she stood and looked at him as he spoke just as she had looked at Arbuthnot a moment before. Arbuthnot began to give mild attention to his coffee.

"It is quite cold," he said to Bertha. "Will you give me another cup?"

"Yes," she answered, and took it from his hand to carry it to the table. He followed her, and stood at her side as she poured the fresh cup out.

"It is my impression," he said, with serene illiberality, "that she did not remember him at all."

"Yes, she did," Bertha replied. "She remembers everybody. That is one of her gifts. She has a great many gifts."

"I did not place implicit confidence in her intimation that she remembered me," he proceeded, still serenely. "I liked the statement, and saw the good taste of it, and the excellent reasons for its being true, but I managed to restrain the naive impulses of a trusting nature. And it doesn't strike me as being so entirely plausible that she should have remembered Tredennis."

He paused suddenly and looked at Bertha's hand, in which she held the sugar-tongs and a lump of sugar.

"Will you have one lump or two?" she asked.

Then he looked from her hand to her face. Her hand was trembling, and her face was entirely without colour. The look of strained

steadiness in her uplifted eyes was a shock to him. It seemed to him that any one who chanced to glance at her must see it.

"You have been standing too long," he said. "You have tired yourself out again."

He took the cup of coffee from her.

"It is too late for you to expect many calls now," he said, "and if any one comes you can easily be found in the conservatory. I am going to take you there, and let you sit down for a few seconds at least."

He gave her his arm and carried the cup of coffee with him.

"You will have to drink this yourself," he said. "Have you eaten anything to-day?"

"No," she replied.

"I thought not. And then you are surprised to find your hand trembling. Don't you see what utter nonsense it is?"

"Yes."

He stepped with her into the tiny conservatory at the end of the room, and gave her a seat behind a substantial palm on a red stand. His eyes never left her face, though he went on talking in the most matter-of-fact tone.

"Drink that coffee," he said, "and then I will bring you a glass of wine and a sandwich."

She put out her hand as if to take the cup, but it fell shaking upon her lap.

"I can't," she said.

"You must," he replied.

The inflexibility of his manner affected her, as he had known it would. When he sat down in the low seat at her side and held out the cup, she took it.

"Go and get the wine," she said, without looking at him.

He went at once, neither speaking nor glancing back at her. He was glad of the opportunity of turning his face away from her, since he felt that, in spite of his determination, it was losing something of its expressionless calm.

When he entered the room Mrs. Sylvestre still stood where he had left her. It was she who was speaking now, and Tredennis who was listening, looking down upon her with an expression of much interest.

When he had procured a glass of wine and a sandwich, Arbuthnot went to her.

"I have secreted Mrs. Amory in the conservatory," he said, "with a view of inducing her to take something in the form of sustenance. I can produce her at a moment's notice if she is needed."

"That was consideration," she replied.

"It was humanity," he answered, and went away.

Bertha had finished the coffee when he returned to her. The blanched look had left her, and her voice when she spoke sounded more natural and steady.

"It did me good," she said, and this time she looked at him, and there was something in her uplifted eyes which touched him.

"I knew it would," he answered.

"You always know," she said. "There is no one who knows so well what is good for me;" and she said it with great gentleness.

He took refuge from himself, as he sometimes found it discreet to do, in his usual airy lightness.

"I am all soul myself," he remarked, "as you may have observed, and I understand the temptation to scorn earthly food and endeavour to subsist wholly upon the plaudits of the multitude. You will, perhaps, permit me to remark that though the new gown"—with an approving glance at it—"is an immense and unqualified success, I doubt its power to sustain nature during the six or eight hours of a New Year's reception."

Bertha glanced down at it herself.

"Do you think it is pretty?" she asked.

"I shouldn't call it pretty," he replied. "I should call it something more impressive."

She still looked at it.

"It is a flaring thing," she said.

"No, it isn't," he returned, promptly. "Not in the least. You might call it brilliant—if you insist on an adjective. It is a brilliant thing, and it is not like you in the least."

She turned towards him.

"No," she said, "it isn't like me in the least."

"It looks," remarked Arbuthnot, giving it some lightly critical attention, "as if you had taken a new departure."

"That is it exactly," she returned. "You always say the right thing. I have taken a new departure."

"Might I ask in what direction?" he inquired.

"Yes," she responded. "I will tell you, as a fair warning. I am going to be a dazzling and worldly creature."

"You are?" he said. "Now that is entirely sensible, though I should scarcely call it a new departure. You know you tried it last winter, with the most satisfying results. When Lent

came on you had lost several pounds in weight and all your colour, you had refined existence until neither rest nor food appeared necessary to you, and the future was naturally full of promise. Be gay by all means; you'll find it pay, I assure you. Go to a lunch-party at one, and a reception at four, a dinner in the evening, and drop in at a German or so on your way home, taking precautions at the same time against neglecting your calling list in the intervals these slight recreations allow you. Oh, I should certainly advise you to be gay."

"Laurence," she said, "do you think that if one should do that *every* day, *every* day, and give oneself *no* rest, that after a while it would *kill* one?"

He regarded her fixedly for an instant.

"Do you want to die?" he said at last.

She sat perfectly still, and something terribly like and yet terribly unlike a smile crept slowly into her eyes as they met his. Then she replied, without flinching in the least or moving her gaze:

"No."

He held up a long, slender forefinger, and shook it at her, slowly, in his favourite gesture of warning.

"No," he said, "you don't—but even if you fancied you did, don't flatter yourself that it would happen. Shall I tell you what would occur? You would simply break down. You would lose your self-control and do things you did not wish to do, you would find it a physical impossibility to be equal to the occasion, and you would end by being pale and haggard—haggard, and discovering that your gowns were not becoming to you. How does the thing strike you?"

"It is very brutal," she said, with a little shudder, "but it is true."

"When you make ten remarks that are true," he returned, "nine of them are brutal. That is the charm of life."

"I don't think," she said, with inconsequent resentment, "that you very much mind being brutal to me."

"A few minutes ago you said I knew what was good for you," he responded.

"You do," she said, "that is it, and it is only like me that I should hate you because you do. You must think," with a pathetic tone of appeal for herself in her voice, "that I do not mind being brutal to you, but I don't want to be. I don't

want to do any of the things I am doing now."

She picked up the bouquet of Jacqueminot roses she had been carrying and had laid down near her.

"Don't talk about me," she said. "Let us talk about something else—these, for instance. Do you know where they came from?"

"I could scarcely guess."

"Senator Planefield sent them to me."

He regarded them in silence.

"They match the dress," she said, "and they belong to it."

"Yes," he answered, "they match the dress."

Then he was silent again.

"Well," she said, restlessly, "why don't you say something to me?"

"There isn't anything to say," he replied.

"You are thinking that I am very bad?" she said.

"You are trying to persuade yourself that you are very bad, and are finding a fictitious excitement in it, but it is all a mistake. It won't prove the consolation you expect it to," he answered. "Suppose

you give it up before it gives rise to complications."

"We are talking of Bertha Amory again," she said. "Let us talk about Agnes Sylvestre. Don't you find her very beautiful?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Why don't you say more than 'yes'?" she asked. "You mean more."

"I couldn't mean more," he answered. "I should think it was enough to mean that much—there are even circumstances under which it might be too much."

"She is lovelier than she used to be," said Bertha, reflectively. "And more fascinating."

"Yes to that also," he responded.

"Any one might love her," she went on in the same tone. "*Any* one."

"I should think so," he replied, quietly.

"I do not see how it would be possible," she added, "for any one—who was thrown with her—to resist her—unless it was some one like you."

She turned a faint smile upon him.

"I am glad," she said, "that *you* are not susceptible."

"So am I," he said, with some dryness.

"If you were susceptible you would go

too," she ended. "And I don't want *every* one to leave me."

"Every one?" he repeated.

She rose as if to go, giving a light touch to the folds of her dress, and still smiling a little.

"Colonel Tredennis has fallen a victim," she said, "in the most natural and proper manner. I knew he would, and he has distinguished himself by at once carrying out my plans for him. Now we must go back to the parlours. I have rested long enough."

They returned just in time to meet a fresh party of callers, and Arbuthnot was of necessity thrown for the time being upon his own resources. These did not fail him. He found entertainment in his surroundings, until a certain opportunity he had rather desired presented itself to him. He observed that Mrs. Sylvestre was once more near him, and that the men occupying her attention were on the point of taking their leave. By the time they had done so he had dexterously brought to a close his conversation with his male companion, and had unobtrusively forwarded himself, in an entirely incidental manner, as an aspirant for her notice.

She received him with a quiet suggestion of pleasure in her smile.

"Have you enjoyed the day?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. "I am almost sorry that it is so nearly over. It has been very agreeable."

Then he found her eyes resting upon him in the quiet and rather incomprehensible way which Bertha had counted among her chiefest charms.

"Have you enjoyed it?" she inquired.

"If I had not," he said, "I should feel rather like a defeated candidate. One may always enjoy things if one applies oneself."

She seemed to reflect upon him an instant again.

"You see a great deal of Bertha?" she said.

"Yes, a great deal. Would you mind telling me why you ask?"

"Because that remark was so entirely like her," she replied.

"Well," he returned, "there is no denying that I have formed myself upon her, and though the fact reveals me in all my shallow imitative weakness, I can offer the apology that the means justifies the end. Upon the

whole, I am glad to be detected, as it points to a measure of success in the attempt."

"But," she went on, "she tells me that she has formed herself upon you."

"Ah," he said; "she meant you to repeat it to me—her design being to betray me into a display of intoxicated vanity."

"She is very fond of you," she remarked.

"I am very fond of her," he answered, quickly—and then relapsing into his usual manner—"though that is not a qualification sufficiently rare to distinguish me."

"No," she said, "it is not."

Then she gave Bertha one of the glances.

"It was very thoughtful in you to take her into the conservatory," she said. "I was startled to see how pale she looked as you left the room."

"She is not strong," he said, "and she insists on ignoring the fact."

"Do you know," said Mrs. Sylvestre, "that was what struck me when we met for the first time in the autumn—that she was not strong. She used to be strong."

"If she would accept the fact she would get over it," he said, "but she won't."

"I met her first at Newport," said Mrs.

Sylvestre, "just after Janey's illness. For a day or so I felt that I did not know her at all; but in course of time I got over the feeling—or she changed—I scarcely know which. I suppose the strain during the little girl's illness had been very severe?"

"There is no doubt of that," said Arbuthnot; "and her anxiety had been much exaggerated."

"I shall see a great deal of her this winter," she returned, "and perhaps I may persuade her to take care of herself."

He spoke with a touch of eager seriousness in his manner.

"I wish you would," he said. "It is what she needs that some woman should call her attention to the mistake she is making."

"I will try to do it," she responded, gently. "I am fond of her too."

"And you intend remaining in Washington?" he asked.

"Yes. I have had no plans for three years. When first it dawned on me that it would interest me to make plans again, I thought of Washington. I have found a house in Lafayette Square, and I think I shall be established in it, with the assistance of my

aunt, who is to live with me, in about three weeks."

"That sounds very agreeable," he remarked.

"I shall hope to make it sufficiently so," she said. "Will you come sometimes to see if my efforts are successful?"

"If you knew how unworthy I am," he responded, "even my abject gratitude for your kindness would not repay you for it."

"Are you so very unworthy?" she was beginning, when her eye appeared to be caught by some object at the other side of the room.

It was not a particularly interesting object. It was merely the figure of an unprepossessing boy, whose provincial homeliness was rendered doubly impressive by his frightful embarrassment. He had arrived a few moments before with two more finished youths, whose mother Bertha knew, and having been basely deserted by them at the outset had stranded upon the treacherous shores of inexperience as soon as he had shaken hands.

Mrs. Sylvestre's beautiful eyes dwelt upon him a moment with sympathy and interest.

"Will you excuse me," she said to Arbuthnot,

"if I go and talk to that boy? Bertha is too busy to attend to him, and he seems to know no one."

Arbuthnot gave the boy a glance. He would not have regretted any comparatively harmless incident which would have removed him, but his own very naturally ignoble desire not to appear to a disadvantage restrained the impulse prompting a derisive remark. And while he objected to the boy in his most pronounced manner, he did not object in the least to what he was clever enough to see in his companion's words and the ready sympathy they expressed. Indeed, there was a side of him which derived definite pleasure from it.

"I will excuse you," he answered; "but I need you more than the boy does, and I cannot help believing I am more worthy of you—though of course, I only use the word in its relative sense. As I remarked before, I am unworthy, but as compared to the boy——! He is a frightful boy," he added, seeming to take him in more fully, "but I dare say his crimes are unpremeditated. Let me go with you and find out if I know his mother. I frequently know their mothers."

"If you do know his mother, I am sure it will be a great relief to him, and it will assist me," said Mrs. Sylvestre.

They crossed the room together, and, seeing them approach, the boy blushed vermilion and moved uneasily from one foot to the other. Gradually, however, his aspect changed a little. Here were rather attractive worldlings whose bearing expressed no consciousness whatever of his crime of boyhood. He met Mrs. Sylvestre's eyes and blushed less; he glanced furtively at Arbuthnot, and suddenly forgot his hands and became almost unconscious of his legs.

"I have been asking Mrs. Sylvestre," said Arbuthnot, with civil mendacity, "if you did not come with the Bartletts. I thought I saw you come in together."

"Yes," responded the boy. "I am a cousin of theirs."

"Then I have heard them speak of you," Arbuthnot returned. "And I think I had the pleasure of meeting your sister several times last winter—Miss Hemingway?"

"Yes," said the boy, "she was here on a visit."

In two minutes he found himself conversing

almost fluently, and it was Arbuthnot who was his inspiration equally with Mrs. Sylvestre. He was a modest and inoffensive youth, and over-estimated the brilliance of the scenes surrounding him, and the gifts and charms of his new-found friends, with all the ardour of his tender years. To him, Arbuthnot's pale, well-bred face and simple immaculate attire represented luxury, fashion, and the whirling vortex of society. The kindly imagination of simplicity bestowed upon him an unlimited income and an exalted position in the diplomatic *corps* at least—his ease of manner and readiness of speech seeming gifts only possible of attainment through familiarity with foreign courts and effete civilisations. When he was asked how he liked Washington, if he intended to spend the season with his relations, if he had made many calls, and if the day did not seem to be an unusually gay one, he accomplished the feat of answering each question, even adding an original remark or so of his own. The conversation seemed to assume a tone of almost feverish brilliancy in view of the social atmosphere surrounding these queries. When he was led into the adjoining room to partake of refreshments, he

ate his lobster salad with an honest young appetite, much aided by the fact that Mrs. Sylvestre gave him his coffee, and, taking a cup herself, sat down by him on a sofa. As he watched her, Arbuthnot was thinking her manner very soft and pretty, and inspired by it his own became all that could be desired in the way of dexterity and tact. As he exercised himself in his entertainment, his first objections to the boy gradually vanished; he plied him with refreshments, and encouraged him to renewed conversational effort, deriving finally some satisfaction from finding himself able to bring to bear upon him with successful results his neatly arranged and classified social gifts. When the young Bartletts—who had been enjoying themselves immensely in the next room—suddenly remembered their charge and came in search of him, their frank countenances expressed some surprise at the position they found him occupying. He was relating with some spirit the story of a boat-race, and Mrs. Sylvestre, who sat at his side, was listening with the most perfect air of attention and pleasure, while Arbuthnot stood near, apparently bent upon losing nothing of the history. He ended

the story with some natural precipitation and rose to go, a trifle of his embarrassment returning as he found himself once more, as it were, exposed to the glare of day. He was not quite sure what conventionality demanded of him in the way of adieus, but when Mrs. Sylvestre relieved him by extending her hand, nature got the better of him, and he seized it with ardour.

"I've had a splendid time," he said, blushing. "This is the nicest reception I've been to yet. The house is so pretty and—and everything. I was thinking I shouldn't go anywhere else, but I believe I shall now."

When he shook hands with Arbuthnot he regarded him with admiration and awe.

"I'm much obliged to you," he said, his vague sense of indebtedness taking form. "If you ever come to Whippleville I'm sure my father would like to—to see you."

And he retired with his young relatives, blushing still, and occasionally treading on their feet, but his modesty, notwithstanding, bearing with him an inoffensive air of self-respect, which would be more than likely to last him through the day, and perhaps a little beyond it.

Mrs. Sylvestre's eyes met Arbuthnot's when he was gone.

"You were *very* kind to him," she said.

"I am obliged to confess," he replied, "that it was nothing but the low promptings of vanity which inspired me. It dawned upon me that he was impressed by my superior ease and elegance, and I seized the opportunity of exhibiting them."

"You knew just what to say to him," she added.

"That," he replied, "was entirely owing to the fact that I was a boy myself in the early part of the last century."

"He was an appreciative boy," she said, "and a grateful one, but I am sure I could not have made him comfortable if you had not been so kind."

And she once again bestowed upon him the subtle flattery of appearing to lose herself an instant in reflection upon him.

There were no more callers after this. Later on an unconventional little dinner was served, during which Mrs. Sylvestre was placed between Arbuthnot and Tredennis, Planefield loomed up massive and florid at Bertha's side, and Richard devoted himself with delightful

ardour to discussing French politics with the young woman who fell to his share.

This young woman, whose attire was perfect, and whose manner was admirable, and who was furthermore endowed with a piquant, irregular face and a captivating voice, had attracted Tredennis's attention early in the evening. She had been talking to Richard when he had seen her first, and she had been talking to Richard at intervals ever since, and evidently talking very well.

"I don't know your friend," he said to Bertha, after dinner, "and I did not hear her name when I was presented."

"Then you have hitherto lived in vain," said Bertha, glancing at her. "That is what Richard would tell you. Her name is Helen Varien."

"It is a very pretty name," remarked Tredennis.

"Ah!" said Bertha. "You certainly might trust her not to have an ugly one. She has attained that state of finish in the matter of her appendages which insures her being invariably to be relied on. I think she must even have invented her relatives—or have ordered them, giving *carte blanche*."

She watched her a moment with a smile of interest.

"Do you see how her sleeves fit?" she asked. "It was her sleeves which first attracted my attention. I saw them at a lunch in New York, and they gave me new theories of life. When a woman can accomplish sleeves like those, society need ask nothing further of her."

Tredennis glanced down at her own.

"Have you accomplished—" he suggested.

"In moments of rashness and folly," she answered, "I have occasionally been betrayed into being proud of my sleeves, but now I realise that the feeling was simply impious."

He waited with grim patience until she had finished, and then turned his back upon Miss Varien's sleeves.

"Will you tell me about Janey?" he said.

"When last I saw her, which was this morning," she replied, "she was as well as usual, and so were the others. Now I have no doubt they are all in bed."

"May I come and see them to-morrow or the day after?"

"Yes," she answered. "And at any time. I hope you will come often. Mrs. Sylvestre will

be with me until her house is ready for her, and, as I said before, I wish you to know her well."

"I shall feel it a great privilege," he responded.

She leaned back a little in her chair, and regarded her with an expression of interest even greater than she had been aroused to by the contemplation of Miss Varien's sleeves.

"Have you found out yet," she inquired, "what her greatest charm is?"

"Is it by any chance a matter of sleeves?" he asked—and he made the suggestion stolidly.

"No," she answered, "it is not sleeves. One's difficulty is to decide *what* it is. A week ago, I thought it was her voice. Yesterday I was sure it was her eyelashes and the soft shadow they make about her eyes. About an hour ago I was convinced it was her smile, and now I think it must be her power of fixing her attention upon you. See how it flatters Mr. Arbuthnot, and how, though he is conscious of his weakness, he succumbs to it. It will be very pleasant occupation during the winter to watch his struggles."

"Will he struggle?" said Tredennis, still immovably. "I don't think I would in his lace."

"Oh, no," she answered. "You mustn't struggle."

"I will not," he returned.

She went on with a smile, as if he had spoken in the most responsive manner possible.

"Mr. Arbuthnot's struggles will not be of the usual order," she remarked. "He will not be struggling with his emotions, but with his vanity. He knows that she will not fall in love with him, and he has no intention of falling in love with her. He knows better —and he does not like affairs. But he will find that she is able to do things which will flatter him, and that it will require all his self-control to refrain from displaying his masculine delight in himself and the good fortune which he has the secret anguish of knowing does not depend upon his merits. And his struggles at a decently composed demeanour, entirely untinged by weak demonstrations of pleasure or consciousness of himself will be a very edifying spectacle."

She turned her glance from Arbuthnot and Mrs. Sylvestre, whom she had been watching as she spoke, and looked up at Tredennis. She did so because he had made

a rather sudden movement, and placed himself immediately before her.

"Bertha," he said, "I am going away."

Her Jacqueminot roses had been lying upon her lap. She picked them up before she answered him.

"You have made too many calls," she said. "You are tired."

"I have not made too many calls," he replied, "but I am tired. I am tired of this."

"I was afraid you were," she said, and kept her eyes fixed upon the roses.

"You were very fair to me," he said, "and you gave me warning. I told you I should not profit by it, and I did not. I don't know what I expected when I came here to-day, but it was not exactly this. You are too agile for me; I cannot keep up with you."

"You are not modern," she said. "You must learn to adjust yourself rapidly to changes of mental attitude."

"No, I am not modern," he returned; "and I am always behind hand. I do not enjoy myself when you tell me it is a fine day, and that it was colder yesterday, and will be warmer to-morrow, and I am at a loss when you analyse Mr. Arbuthnot's struggles with his vanity."

"I am not serious enough," she interrupted. "You would prefer that I should be more serious."

"It would avail me but little to tell you what I should prefer," he said obstinately. "I will tell you a simple thing before I go—all this counts for nothing."

She moved slightly.

"All this," she repeated, "counts for nothing."

"For nothing," he repeated. "You cannot change me. I told you that. You may give me some sharp wounds—I know you won't spare those—and because I am only a man I shall show that I smart under them, but they will not move me otherwise. Be as frivolous as you like, mock at everything human if you choose, but don't expect me to believe you."

She put the flowers to her face and held them there a second.

"The one thing I should warn you against," she said, "would be against believing me. I don't make the mistake of believing myself."

She put the flowers down.

"You think I am trying to deceive you," she said. "There would have to be a reason

for my doing it. What should you think would be the reason?"

"So help me God!" he answered, "I don't know."

"Neither do I," she said.

Then she glanced about her over the room —at Planefield, rather restively professing to occupy himself with a pretty girl—at Miss Varien, turned a trifle sidewise in her large chair so that her beautiful sleeve was displayed to the most perfect advantage, and her vivacious face was a little uplifted as she spoke to Richard, who leaned on the high back of her seat—at Arbuthnot, talking to Agnes Sylvestre, and plainly at no loss for words—at the lights and flowers and ornamented tables seen through the *portières*—and then she spoke again.

"I tell you," she said, "it is *this* that is real—*this*. The other was only a kind of dream."

She made a sudden movement and sat upright on her chair, as if she meant to shake herself free from something.

"There was no other," she said. "It wasn't even a dream. There never was anything but this."

She left her chair and stood up before him, smiling.

"The sky was not blue," she said, "nor the hills purple; there were no chestnut trees, and no carnations. Let us go and sit with the rest, and listen to Mr. Arbuthnot and admire Miss Varien's sleeves."

But he stood perfectly still.

"I told you I was going away," he said, "and I am going. To-morrow I shall come and see the children—unless you tell me that you do not wish to see me again."

"I shall not tell you that," she returned, "because it would be at once uncivil and untrue."

"Then I shall come," he said.

"That will be kind of you," she responded, and gave him her hand, and after he had made his bow over it, and his adieus to the rest of the company, he left them.

Bertha crossed the room and stood near the fire, putting one foot on the fender, and shivering a little.

"Are you cold?" asked Miss Varien.

"Yes—no," she answered. "If I did not know better, I should think I was."

"Allow me," said Miss Varien, "to make

the cheerful suggestion that that sounds quite like malaria."

"Thank you," said Bertha; "that seems plausible, and I don't rebel against it. It has an air of dealing with glittering generalities, and yet it seems to decide matters for one. We will call it malaria."

## CHAPTER V.

### BERTHA'S CONFESSION.

THE room which Mrs. Sylvestre occupied in her friend's house was a very pretty one. It had been one of Mrs. Amory's caprices at the time she had fitted it up, and she had amused herself with it for two or three months, arranging it at her leisure, reflecting upon it, and making additions to its charms every day as soon as they suggested themselves to her.

"It is to be a purely feminine apartment," she had said to Richard and Arbuthnot. "And I have a sentiment about it. When it is complete you shall go and stand outside the door and look in, but nothing would induce me to allow you to cross the threshold."

When this moment had arrived, and they had been admitted to the private view from

the corridor, they had evidently been somewhat impressed.

"It is very pretty," Mr. Arbuthnot had remarked with amiable tolerance, "but I don't approve of it. Its object is plainly to pamper and foster those tendencies of the feminine temperament which are most prominent and least desirable. Nothing could be more apparent than its intention to pander to a taste for luxury and self-indulgence, combined in the most shameless manner with vanity and lightness of mind. It will be becoming to the frivolous creatures, and will exalt and inflate them to that extent that they will spend the greater portion of their time in it, utterly ignoring the superior opportunities for cultivating and improving their minds they might enjoy down stairs on occasions when Richard remains at home and my own multifarious duties permit me to drop in. It strikes me as offering a premium to feminine depravity and crime."

"That expresses it exactly," agreed Richard.

Arbuthnot turned him round.

'Will you," he said, "kindly give your attention to the length and position of that

mirror, and the peculiar advantages to be derived from the fact that the light falls upon it from that particular point, and that its effects are softened by the lace draperies and suggestions of pink and blue? The pink and blue idea is merely of a piece with all the rest, and is prompted by the artfulness of the serpent. If it had been all pink the blondes would have suffered, and if it had been all blue the brunettes would have felt that they were not at their best; this ineffably wily combination, however, truckles to either, and intimates that each combines the attractions of both. Take me away, Richard: it is not for the ingenuous and serious mind to view such spectacles as these. Take me away—first, however, making a mental inventory of the entirely debasing sofas and chairs and the flagrant and openly sentimental nature of the pictures, all depicting or insinuating the drivelling imbecility and slavery of man —'The Huguenot Lovers,' you observe, 'The Black Brunswicker,' and others of like nature."

Mrs. Sylvestre had thought the room very pretty indeed when she had first taken possession of it, and its prettiness and comfort

impressed her anew when, the excitement of the New Year's day at last at an end, she retired to it for the night.

When she found herself within the closed doors she did not go to bed at once. Too many impressions had been crowded into the last ten hours to have left her in an entirely reposeful condition of mind and body, and though of too calm a temperament for actual excitement, she was still not inclined to sleep.

So having partly undressed and thrown on a loose wrap, she turned down the light, and went to the fire. It was an open wood-fire; and burned cheerily behind a brass fender; a large rug of white fur was spread upon the hearth before it, a low, broad sofa, luxurious with cushions, was drawn up at one side of it, and upon the rug at the other stood a deep easy-chair. It was this chair she took, and having taken it she glanced up at an oval mirror which was among the ornaments on the opposite wall. In it she saw reflected that portion of the room which seemed to have arranged itself about her own graceful figure—the faint pinks and blues, the flowered drapery, the puffed and padded furniture, and the hundred and one entirely feminine devices of

ornamentation; and she was faintly aware that an expression less thoughtful than the one she wore would have been more in keeping with her surroundings.

"I look too serious to harmonise," she said. "If Bertha were here she would detect the incongruity and deplore it."

But she was in a thoughtful mood, which was not an uncommon experience with her, and the faint smile the words gave rise to died away as she turned to the fire again. What she thought of as she sat and looked into it, it would have been difficult to tell, but there was evidence that she was mentally well occupied in the fact that she sat entirely still and gazed at its flickering flame for nearly half an hour. She would not have moved then, perhaps, if she had not been roused from her reverie by a sound at the door—a low knock and a voice speaking to her.

"Agnes!" it said. "Agnes!"

She knew it at once as Bertha's, and rose to reply to the summons almost as if she had expected or even waited for it. When she unlocked the door and opened it, Bertha was standing on the threshold. She had partly undressed, too. She had laid aside the red

dress and put on a long white negligee, bordered with white fur; there was no colour about her, and it made her look cold. Perhaps she was cold, for Agnes thought she seemed to shiver a little.

"May I come in?" she asked. "I know it is very inconsiderate, but I had a sort of conviction that you would not be asleep."

"I was not thinking of going to sleep yet," said Agnes. "I am glad you have come."

Bertha entered, and, the door being closed, crossed the room to the fire. She did not take a chair, but sat down upon the hearth-rug.

"This is very feminine," she said, "and we ought to be in bed, but the day would not be complete without it."

Then she turned towards Agnes.

"You must have a great deal to think of to-night," she said.

Agnes Sylvestre looked at the fire.

"Yes," she answered, "I have a great deal to think of."

"Are they things you like to think of?"

"Some of them—not all."

"It must be a curious experience," said Bertha, "to find yourself here again after so

many years—with all your life changed for you."

Mrs. Sylvestre did not reply.

"You have not been here," Bertha continued, "since you went away on your wedding journey. You were nineteen or twenty then—only a girl."

"I was young," said Mrs. Sylvestre, "but I was rather mature for my years. I did not feel as if I was exactly a girl."

Then she added in a lower voice:

"I had experienced something which had ripened me."

"You mean," said Bertha, "that you knew what love was."

She had not intended to say the words, and their abrupt directness grated upon her as she spoke, but she could not have avoided uttering them.

Mrs. Sylvestre paused a moment.

"The experience I passed through," she said, "did not belong to my age. It was not a girl's feeling. I think it came too soon."

"You had two alternatives to choose from," said Bertha,—"that it should come too soon or too late."

Mrs. Sylvestre paused again.

"You do not think," she said, "that it ever comes to any one at the right time?"

Bertha had been sitting with her hands folded about her knee. She unclasped and clasped them with a sharply vehement movement.

"It is a false thing from beginning to end," she said. "I do not believe in it."

"Ah," said Mrs. Sylvestre, softly, "I believe in it. I wish I did not."

"What is there to be gained by it?" said Bertha,—"a feeling that is not to be reasoned about or controlled—a miserable, feverish emotion you cannot understand, and can only resent and struggle against blindly. When you let it conquer you, how can you respect yourself or the object of it? What do women love men for? Who knows? It is like madness! All you can say is, 'I love him. He is life or death to me.' It is so unreasoning—so unreasoning."

She stopped suddenly, as if all at once she became conscious that her companion was looking at herself instead of at the fire.

"You love a man generally," said Mrs. Sylvestre, in her tenderly modulated voice—"at least I have thought so—because he is

the one human creature of all others who is capable of causing you the greatest amount of suffering. I don't know of any other reason, and I have thought of it a great deal."

"It is a good reason," said Bertha,—"a good reason."

Then she laughed.

"This is just a little tragic, isn't it?" she said. "What a delightfully emotional condition we must be in to have reached tragedy in less than five minutes, and entirely without intention! I did not come to be tragic—I came to be analytical. I want you to tell me carefully how we strike you."

"We?" said Mrs. Sylvestre.

Bertha touched herself on the breast.

"We," she said. "I, Richard, Laurence Arbuthnot, Colonel Tredennis, Senator Planefield, the two hundred men—callers—Washington in short. How does Washington strike you, now that you come to it again?"

"Won't you give me two weeks to reflect upon it?" said Agnes.

"No. I want impressions, not reflections. Is it all very much changed?"

"I am very much changed," was the reply.

"And we?" said Bertha. "Suppose—suppose you begin with Laurence Arbuthnot."

"I do not think I could. He is not one of the persons I have remembered."

"Agnes," said Bertha, "only wait with patience for one of those occasions when you feel it necessary to efface him, and then tell him that, in exactly that tone of voice, and he will in that instant secretly atone for the crimes of a life-time. He won't wince, and he will probably reply in the most brilliant and impersonal manner, but, figuratively speaking, you will have reduced him to powder and cast him to the breeze."

"We shall not be sufficiently intimate to render such a thing possible," said Mrs. Sylvestre. "One must be intimate with a man to be angry enough with him to wish to avenge oneself."

Bertha smiled.

"You don't like him," she said. "Poor Larry!"

"On the contrary," was her friend's reply. "But it would not occur to me to 'begin with him,' as you suggested just now."

"With whom, then," said Bertha, "would you begin?"

Her guest gave a moment to reflection, during which Bertha regarded her intently.

"If I were going to begin at all," she said, rather slowly, "I think it would be with Colonel Tredennis."

There was a moment of silence, and then Bertha spoke in a somewhat cold and rigid voice.

"What do you like about him?" she asked.

"I think I like everything."

"If you were any one else," said Bertha, "I should say that you simply like his size. I think that is generally it. Women invariably fall victims to men who are big and a little lumbering. They like to persuade themselves that they are overawed and subjected. I never understood it myself. Big men never pleased me very much—they are so apt to tread on you."

"I like his eyes," said Agnes, apparently reflecting aloud—"they are very kind. And I like his voice——"

"It is rather too deep," remarked Bertha, "and sometimes I am a little afraid it will degenerate into a growl, though I have never heard it do so yet."

Mrs. Sylvestre went on:

"When he bends his head a little and looks down at you as you talk," she said, "he is very nice. He is really thinking of you and regarding you seriously. I do not think he is given to trifling."

"No," returned Bertha, "I do not think he is given to anything special but being massive. That is what you are thinking—that he is massive."

"There is no denying," said her friend, "that that is one of the things I like."

"Ah!" said Bertha, "you find the rest of us very flippant and trivial. *That* is how we strike you!"

A fatigued little sigh escaped her lips.

"After all," she said, "it is true. And we have obliged ourselves to be trivial for so long that we are incapable of seriousness. Sometimes—generally towards Lent, after I have been out a great deal—I wonder if the other would not be interesting for a change; but, at the same time, I know I could not be serious if I tried."

"Your seriousness will be deeper," said Mrs. Sylvestre, "when you accomplish it without trying."

She was serious herself as she spoke, but

her seriousness was extremely gentle. She looked at Bertha even tenderly, and her clear eyes were very expressive.

"We are both changed since we met here last," she said, with simple directness, "and it is only natural that what we have lived through should have affected us differently. We are of very different temperaments. You were always more vivid and intense than I, and suffering—if you had suffered——"

Her soft voice faltered a little, and she paused. Bertha turned and looked her unflinchingly in the face.

"I—have not suffered," she said.

Agnes spoke as simply as before.

"I have," she said.

Bertha turned sharply away.

"I was afraid so," was her response.

"If we are to be as near to each other as I hope," Agnes continued, "it would be useless for me to try to conceal from you the one thing which has made me what I am. The effort to hide it would always stand between us and our confidence in each other. It is much simpler to let you know the truth."

She put her hands up to her face an instant,

and Bertha broke the silence with a curiously incisive question.

"Was he very cruel to you?"

Agnes withdrew her hands, and if her shadow of a smile had not been so infinitely sad, it would have been bitter.

"He could not help it," she said; "and when I was calm enough to reason, I knew he was not to blame for my imagination. It was all over in a few months, and he would have been quite content to bear what followed philosophically. When the worst came to the worst, he told me that he had known it could not last—because such things never did, but that he had also known that, even after the inevitable termination, I should always please him and display good taste. He had lived through so much, and I had known so little. I only spoke openly to him once—one awful day, and after that I scarcely know what happened to me for months. I asked him to let me go away alone, and I went to the sea-side. Since then the sound of the sea has been a terror to me, and yet there are times when I long to hear it. I used to tell myself that, on one of those days when I sat on the sand and looked at the

sea, I died, and that I have never really lived since. Something happened to me—I don't know what. It was one brilliant morning when the sun beat on the blue water and the white sand, and everything was a dazzling glare. I sat on the beach for hours without moving, and when I got up and walked away I remember hearing myself saying, 'I have left you behind—I have left you behind—I shall never see you again.' I was ill for several days afterwards, and when I recovered I seemed to have become a new creature. When my husband came, I was able to meet him so calmly that I think it was even a kind of shock to him."

"And that was the end?" said Bertha.

"Yes, that was the end—for me."

"And for him?"

"Once or twice afterwards it interested him to try experiments with me, and when they failed, he was not pleased."

"Were you never afraid," said Bertha, "that they would not fail?"

"No. There is nothing so final as the ending of such a feeling. There is nothing to come after it, because it has taken everything with it—passion, bitterness, sorrow—

even regret. I never wished that it might return after the day I spoke of. I have thought if, by stretching forth my hand, I could have brought it all back just as it was at first, I should not have wished to do it. It had been too much."

"It is a false thing," said Bertha—"a false thing, and there must always be some such end to it."

Agnes Sylvestre was silent again, and because of her silence, Bertha repeated her words with feverish eagerness.

"It must always end so," she said.

"*You* know that—you *must* know it."

"I am only one person," was the characteristic answer. "And I do not know. I do not want to know. I only want quiet now. I have learned enough."

"Agnes," said Bertha, "that is very pathetic."

"Yes," Agnes answered, "I know it is pathetic, when I allow myself to think of it." And for the first time her voice broke a little, and was all the sweeter for the break in it. But it was over in a moment, and she spoke as she had spoken before.

"But I did not mean to be pathetic," she

said. "I only wanted to tell you the entire truth, so that there should be nothing between us, and nothing to avoid. There can be nothing now. You know of me all that is past, and you can guess what is to come."

"No, I cannot do that," said Bertha.

Agnes smiled.

"It is very easy," she responded. "I shall have a pretty house, and I shall amuse myself by buying new or old things for it and by moving the furniture. I shall give so much thought to it that after a while it will be quite celebrated in a small way, and Miss Jessup will refer to it as 'unique.' Mrs. Merriam will be with me, and I shall have my reception day, and perhaps my 'evening,' and I shall see as many of the charming people who come to Washington as is possible. You will be very good to me, and come to see me often, and—so I hope will Mr. Arbuthnot, and Colonel Tredennis——"

"Agnes," interposed Bertha, with an oddly hard manner, "if they do, one or both of them will fall in love with you."

"If it is either," responded Mrs. Sylvestre, serenely, "I hope it will be Mr. Arbuthnot, as he would have less difficulty in recovering."

"You think," said Bertha, "that nothing could ever touch you again—nothing?"

"Think!" was the response: "my safety lies in the fact that I do not think of it at all. If I were twenty I might do so, and everything would be different. Life is very short. It is not long enough to run risks in. I shall not trifle with what is left to me."

"Oh," cried Bertha, "how calm you are—how calm you are!"

"Yes," she answered, "I am calm now."

But she put her hands up to her face again for an instant, and her eyelashes were wet when she withdrew them.

"It was a horribly dangerous thing," she said, brokenly. "There were so many temptations—the temptation to find excitement in avenging myself on others was strongest of all. I suppose it is the natural savage impulse. There were times when I longed to be cruel. And then I began to think—and there seemed so much suffering in life—and everything seemed so pitiful. And I could not bear the thought of it." And she ended with the sob of a child.

"It is very womanish to cry," she whispered, "and I did not mean to do it, but—you look

at me so." And she laid her cheek against the cushioned back of her chair, and, for a little while, was more pathetic in her silence than she could have been in any words she might have uttered. It was true that Bertha had looked at her. There were no tears in her own eyes. Her feeling was one of obstinate resistance to all emotion in herself; but she did not resent her friend's; on the contrary, she felt a strange enjoyment of it.

"Don't stop crying because I am here," she said. "I like to see you do it."

Mrs. Sylvestre recovered herself at once. She sat up, smiling a little. There were no disfiguring traces of her emotion on her fair face.

"Thank you," she answered; "but I do not like it myself so much, and I have not done it before for a long time."

It was, perhaps, because Mr. Arbuthnot presented himself as an entirely safe topic, with no tendency whatever to develope the sensibilities, that she choose him as the subject of her next remarks.

"I do not see much change in your friend," she observed.

"If you mean Laurence," Bertha replied, "I dare say not. He does not allow things to happen to him. He knows better."

"And he has done nothing whatever during the last seven years?"

"He has been to a great many parties," said Bertha, "and he has read a book or so, and sung several songs."

"I hope he has sung them well," was her friend's comment.

"It always depends upon his mood," Bertha returned; "but there have been times when he has sung them very well indeed."

"It can scarcely have been a great tax to have done it occasionally," said Mrs. Sylvestre, "but I should always be rather inclined to think it was the result of chance and not effort. Still"—with a sudden conscientious scruple brought about by her recollection of the fact that these marks of disapproval had not expressed themselves in her manner earlier in the day—"still he is very agreeable, one cannot deny that."

"It is always safe not to attempt to deny it, even if you feel inclined," was Bertha's comment, "because if you do, he will inevitably prove to you that you

were in the wrong before he has done with you."

"He did one thing I rather liked," her companion proceeded. "He was very nice —in that peculiar impartial way of his—to a boy——"

"The boy who came with the Bartletts?" Bertha interposed. "I saw him and was positively unhappy about him because I could not attend to him. Did he take him in hand?" she asked, brightening visibly. "I knew he would, if he noticed him particularly. It was just like him to do it."

"I saw him first," Mrs. Sylvestre explained, "but I am afraid I should not have been equal to the occasion if Mr. Arbuthnot had not assisted me. It certainly surprised me that he should do it. He knew the Bartletts, and had met the boy's sister, and in the most wonderful, yet the most uneffusive and natural, way, he utilised his material until the boy felt himself quite at home, and not out of place at all. One of the nicest things was the way in which he talked about Whippleville—the boy came from Whippleville. He seemed to give it a kind of interest and importance, and even picturesqueness.

He did not pretend to have been there; but he knew something of the country, which is pretty, and he was very clever in saying neither too much nor too little. Of course that was nice."

"Colonel Tredennis could not have done it," said Bertha.

Agnes paused. She felt there was something of truth in the statement, but she was reluctant to admit it.

"Why not?" she inquired.

"By reason of the very thing which is his attraction for you—because he is too massive to be adroit."

Agnes was silent.

"Was it not Colonel Tredennis who went to Virginia when your little girl was ill?" she asked, in a few moments.

"Yes," was Bertha's response. "He came because Richard was away and papa was ill."

"It was Janey who told me of it," said Agnes, quietly. "And she made a very pretty story of it, in her childish way. She said that he carried her up and down the room when she was tired, and that when her head ached he helped her not to cry. He must be very

gentle. I like to think of it. It is very picturesque; the idea of that great soldierly fellow nursing a frail little creature, and making her pain easier to bear. Do you know, I find myself imagining that I know how he looked."

Bertha sat perfectly still. She, too, knew how he had looked. But there was no reason, she told herself, for the sudden horrible revulsion of feeling which rushed upon her with the remembrance. A little while before, when Agnes had told her story, there had been a reason why she should be threatened by her emotions; but now it was different—now that there was, so to speak, no pathos in the air—now that they were merely talking of commonplace, unemotional things. But she remembered so well—if she could have forced herself to forget for one instant, she might have overcome the passion of unreasoning anguish which seized her; but it was no use, and as she made the effort, Agnes sat and watched her, a strange questioning dawning slowly in her eyes.

"He looked—very large——"

She stopped short, and her hands clutched each other hard and close. A wild thought of

getting up and leaving the room came to her, and then she knew it was too late.

A light flickered up from the wood fire and fell upon her face as she slowly turned it to Agnes.

For an instant Agnes simply looked at her, then she uttered a terror-stricken exclamation.

"Bertha!" she cried.

"Well," said Bertha. "Well!" But at her next breath she began to tremble, and left her place on the hearth and stood up, trembling still. "I am tired out," she said. "I must go away. I ought not to have come here."

But Agnes rose and went to her, laying her hand on her arm. She had grown pale herself, and there was a thrill of almost passionate feeling in her words when she spoke.

"No," she said. "You were right to come. *This* is the place for you."

She drew her down upon the sofa and held both her hands.

"Do you think I would let you go now," she said, "until you had told me everything? Do you think I did not know there was something you were struggling with? When

I told you of my own unhappiness it was because I hoped it would help you to speak. If you had not known that I had suffered you could not have told me. You *must* tell me now. What barrier could there be between us —two women who have—who have been hurt, and who should know how to be true to each other?"

Bertha slipped from her grasp and fell upon her knees by the sofa, covering her face.

"Agnes," she panted, "I never thought of this—I don't know how it has come about. I never meant to speak. Almost the worst of it all is that my power over myself is gone, and that it has even come to this —that I am speaking when I meant to be silent. Don't look at me! I don't know what it all means! All my life has been so different—it is so unlike me—that I say to myself it cannot be true. Perhaps it is not. I have never believed in such things! I don't think I believe now—I don't know what it means, I say, or whether it will last, and if it is not only a sort of illness that I shall get better of. I am trying with all my strength to believe that—and to get better, but while it lasts——"

"Go on," said Agnes, in a hushed voice.

Bertha threw out her hands and wrung them, the pretty baubles she had not removed when she undressed jingling on her wrists.

"It is worse for me than for any one else," she cried. "Worse, worse! It is not fair. I was not prepared for it. I was so sure it was not true; I can't understand it! But whether it is true or not, while it lasts, Agnes, just while it last—" And she hid her face again, and the bangles and serpents of silver and gold jingled more merrily than ever.

"You think," said Agnes, "that you will get over it?"

"Get over it!" she cried. "How often do you suppose I have said to myself that I *must* get over it? How many thousand times? I *must* get over it. Is it a thing to trifle with and be sentimental over? It is a degradation. I don't spare myself. No one could say to me more than I say to myself. I cannot bear it, and I *must* get over it, but I don't—I don't—I don't. And sometimes the horrible thought comes to me that it is a thing you can't get over and it drives me mad, but—but——"

"But what?" said Agnes.

Her hands dropped away from her face.

"If I tell you this," she said, breathlessly, "you will despise me. I think I am going to tell it to you that you *may* despise me. The torture of it will be a sort of penance. When the thought comes to me that I *may* get over it, that it will go out of my life in time, and be lost for ever, then I know that, compared to that, all the rest is nothing—nothing! and that I could bear it for an eternity, the anguish and the shame and the bitterness, if only it might not be taken away."

"Oh!" cried Agnes, "I can believe it—I can believe it!"

"You can believe it?" said Bertha, fiercely. "You? Yes. But I—I cannot!"

For some minutes after this Agnes did not speak. She sat still and looked down at Bertha's cowering figure. There came back to her, with terrible distinctness, times when she herself must have looked so,—only she had always been alone,—and there mingled with the deep feeling of the moment a far-away pity for her own helpless youth and despair.

"Will you tell me," she said, at last, "how it began?"

She was struck when Bertha lifted her

face from its cushions, by the change which had come upon her. All traces of intense and passionate feeling were gone; it was as if her weeping had swept them away, and left only a weariness which made her look pathetically young and helpless. As she watched her, Agnes wondered if she had ever looked up at Tredennis with such eyes.

"I think," she said, "that it was long before I knew. If I had not been so young and so thoughtless, I think I should have known that I began to care for him before he went away the first time. But I was very young, and he was so quiet. There was one day, when he brought me some heliotrope, when I wondered why I liked the quiet things he said; and after he went away I used to wonder in a sort of fitful way what he was doing. And the first time I found myself face to face with a trouble I thought of him and wished for him, without knowing why. I even began a letter to him, but I was too timid to send it."

"Oh, if you had sent it!" Agnes exclaimed, involuntarily.

"Yes—if I had sent it! But I did not. Perhaps it would not have made much

difference if I had—only when I told him of it——"

"You told him of it?" said Agnes.

"Yes—in Virginia. All the wrong I have done, all the indulgence I have allowed myself, is the wrong I did and the indulgence I allowed myself in Virginia. There were days in Virginia when I suppose I was bad enough——"

"Tell me that afterwards," said Agnes. "I want to know how you reached it."

"I reached it," answered Bertha, "in this way. The thing that was my first trouble grew until it was too strong for me—or I was too weak for it. It was my own fault. Perhaps I ought to have known, but I did not. I don't think that I have let any one but myself suffer for my mistake. I couldn't do that. When I found out what a mistake it was, I told myself that it was mine, and that I must abide by it. And in time I thought I had grown quite hard, and I amused myself, and said that nothing mattered—and I did not believe in emotion, and thought I enjoyed living on the surface. I disliked to hear stories of any strong feeling. I tried to avoid reading them, and I was always glad when I

heard clever worldly speeches made. I liked Laurence first because he said such clever, cold-blooded things. He was at his worst when I first knew him. He had lost all his money, and some one had been false to him, and he believed nothing."

"I did not know," said Agnes, "that *he* had a story." And then she added, a trifle hurriedly: "But it does not matter."

"It mattered to him," said Bertha. "And we all have a story—even poor Larry—and even I—even I!"

Then she went on again.

"There was one thing," she said, "that I told myself oftener than anything else, and that was that I was not unhappy. I was always saying that and giving myself reasons. When my dresses were becoming, and I went out a great deal, and people seemed to admire me, I used to say, 'How few women are as happy! How many things I have to make me happy!' and when a horrible moment of leisure came, and I could not bear it I would say, 'How tired I must be to feel as I do—and what nonsense it is!' The one thing Richard has liked most in me has been that I have not given way to my moods, and have always

reasoned about them. Ah! Agnes, if I had been happier I might have given way to them just a little sometimes, and have been less tired. If I were to die now I know what they would remember of me—that I laughed a great deal and made the house gay."

She went on without tears.

"I think," she said, "that I never felt so sure of myself as I did last winter—so sure that I had lived past things and was quite safe. It was a very gay season, and there were several people here who amused me and made things seem brilliant and enjoyable. When I was not going out, the parlours were always crowded with clever men and women; and when I did go out, I danced and talked and interested myself more than I had ever seemed to do before. I shall never forget the Inauguration Ball. Laurence and Richard were both with me, and I danced every dance, and had the most brilliant night. I don't think one expects to be actually brilliant at an inauguration ball, but that night I think we were, and when we were going away we turned to look back, and Laurence said, 'What a night it has been! We couldn't possibly have had such a night if we had

tried. I wonder if we shall ever have such a night again,' and I said, 'Scores of them, I haven't a doubt,'—but that was the last night of all."

"The last night of all?" repeated Agnes.

"There have been no more nights at all like it, and no more days. The next night but one the Winter Gardners gave a party, and I was there. Laurence brought me some roses and heliotrope, and I carried them, and I remember how the scent of the heliotrope reminded me of the night I sat and talked to Philip Tredennis by the fire. It came back all the more strongly because I had heard from papa of his return. I was not glad that he had come to Washington, and I did not care to see him. He seemed to belong to a time I wanted to forget. I did not know he was to be at the Gardners' until he came in, and I looked up and saw him at the door. You know how he looks when he comes into a room—so tall and strong, and different from all the rest. Does he look different from all the rest, Agnes—or is it only that I think so?"

"He is different," said Agnes. "Even I could see that."

"Oh!" said Bertha, despairingly, "I don't know what it is that makes it so, but sometimes I have thought that, perhaps, when first men were on earth they were like that—strong and earnest, and simple and brave—never trifling with themselves or others, and always ready to be tender with those who suffer or are weak. If you only knew the stories we have heard of his courage and determination and endurance! I do not think he ever remembers them himself, but how can the rest of us forget!"

"The first thought I had when I saw him was that it was odd that the mere sight of him should startle me so. And then I watched him pass through the crowds, and tried to make a paltry satirical comment to myself upon his size and his grave face. And then, against my will, I began to wonder what he would do when he saw me, and if he would see what had happened to me since he had given me the flowers for my first party—and I wished he had stayed away—and I began to feel tired—and just then he turned and saw me."

She paused and sank into a wearied sitting posture, resting her cheek against the sofa cushion.

"It seems so long ago—so long ago," she said, "and yet it is not one short year since."

She went on almost monotonously.

"He saw the change in me—I knew that—though he did not know what it meant. I suppose he thought the bad side of me had developed instead of the good, because the bad had predominated in the first place."

"He never thought that," Agnes interposed. "Never!"

"Don't you think so?" said Bertha. "Well, it was not my fault if he didn't. I don't know whether it was natural or not that I should always make the worst of myself before him, but I always did. I did not want him to come to the house, but Richard brought him again and again, until he had been so often that there must have been some serious reasons if he had stayed away. And then—and then——"

"What then?" said Agnes.

She made a gesture of passionate impatience.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "I don't know! I began to be restless and unhappy. I did not care for going out and I dared not stay at home. When I was alone I used to sit and think of that first winter, and compare

myself with the Bertha who lived then as if she had been another creature—some one I had been fond of, and who had died in some sad, unexpected way while she was very young. I used to be angry because I found myself so easily moved—things touched me which had never touched me before; and one day, as I was singing a little German song of farewell—that poor little piteous 'Auf Wiedersehn' we all know—suddenly my voice broke and I gave a helpless sob, and the tears streamed down my cheeks. It filled me with terror. I have never been a crying woman, and I have rather disliked people who cried. When I cried I knew that some terrible change had come upon me, and I hated myself for it. I told myself I was ill, and I said I would go away, but Richard wished me to remain. And every day it was worse and worse. And when I was angry with myself, I revenged myself on the person I should have spared. When I said things of myself which were false, he had a way of looking at me as if he was simply waiting to hear what I would say next, and I never knew whether he believed me or not, and I resented that more than all the rest."

She broke off for an instant, and then began again hurriedly.

"Why should I make such a long story of it?" she said. "I could not tell it all, nor the half of it, if I talked until to-morrow. If I had been given to sentiments and emotions I could not have deceived myself so long as I did, that is all. I have known women who have had experiences and sentiments all their lives, one after another. I used to know girls, when I was a girl, who were always passing through some sentimental adventure, but I was not like that, and I never understood them. But I think it is better to be so than to live unmoved so long that you feel you are quite safe, and then to waken up to face the feeling of a life-time all at once. It is better to take it by instalments. If I had been more experienced I should have been safer. But I deceived myself, and called what I suffered by every name but the right one. I said it was resentment and wounded vanity and weakness, but it was not—it was not. There was one person who knew it was not, though he let me call it what I pleased——"

"He?" said Agnes.

"It was Laurence Arbuthnot who knew. He had been wretched himself once, and while he laughed at me and talked nonsense, he cared enough for me to watch me and understand."

"It would never have occurred to me," remarked Agnes, "to say he did not care for you. I think he cares for you very much."

"Yes, he cares for me," said Bertha, "and I can see now that he was kinder to me than I knew. He stood between me and many a miserable moment, and warded off things I could not have warded off myself. I think he hoped at first that I would get over it. It was he who helped me to make up my mind to go away. It seemed the best thing, but it would have been better if I had not gone."

"Better?" Agnes repeated.

"There was a Fate in it," she said. "Everything was against me. When I said good-bye to—to the person I wished to escape from—though I did not admit to myself then that it was from him I wished to escape—when I said good-bye, I thought it was almost the same thing as saying good-bye for ever. I had always told myself that I was too superficial to be troubled by anything

long, and that I could always forget anything I was determined to put behind me. I had done it before and I fancied I could do it then, and that when I came back in the winter I should have got over my moods, and be stronger physically and not be emotional any more. I meant to take the children and give them every hour of my days, and live out-of-doors in a simple, natural way until I was well. I always called it getting well. But when he came to say good-bye—it was very hard. It was so hard that I was terrified again. He spent the evening with us, and the hours slipped away—slipped away, and every time the clock struck my heart beat so fast that, at last, instead of beating, it seemed only to tremble and make me weak. And at last he got up to go—and I could not believe that it was true, that he was really going, until he went out of the door. And then so much seemed to go with him—and we had only said a few commonplace words—and it was the last—last time. And it all rushed upon me, and my heart leaped in my side, and —and I went to him. There was no other way. And, oh, Agnes——"

"I know—I know!" said Agnes, brokenly.

"But—try not to do that! It is the worst thing you can do—to cry so."

"He did not know why I came," Bertha said. "I don't know what he thought. I don't know what I said. He looked pale and startled at first, and then he took my hand in both his and spoke to me. I have seen him hold Janey's hand so—as if he could not be gentle enough. And he said it was always hard to say good-bye, and would I remember—and his voice was quite unsteady —would I remember that if I should ever need any help he was ready to be called. I had treated him badly and coldly that very evening, but it was as if he forgot it. And I forgot, too, and for just one little moment we were near each other, and there was nothing in our hearts but sadness and kindness, as if we had been friends who had the right to be sad at parting. And we said good-bye again —and he went away.

"I fought very hard in those next two months, and I was very determined. I never allowed myself time to think in the daytime. I played with the children and read to them and walked with them, and, when night came, I used to be tired out—but I did not sleep.

I lay awake, trying to force my thoughts back, and, when morning broke, it seemed as if all my strength was spent. And I did not get well. And, when it all seemed at the worst, suddenly Janey was taken ill, and I thought she would die, and I was all alone, and I sent for papa——"

She broke off with the ghost of a bitter little laugh.

"I have heard a great deal said about fate," she went on. "Perhaps it was fate; I don't know. I don't care now—it doesn't matter. That very day papa was ill himself, and Philip Tredennis came to me—Philip Tredennis!"

"Oh!" cried Agnes, "it was very cruel!"

"Was it cruel?" said Bertha. "It was something. Perhaps it would do to call it cruel. I had been up with Janey for two or three nights. She had suffered a great deal for a little creature, and I was worn out with seeing her pain and not being able to help it. I was expecting the doctor from Washington, and when she fell asleep at last I went to the window to listen, so that I might go down and keep the dogs quiet if he came. It was one of those still, white moonlight nights—the most beautiful night. After a while, I

fancied I heard the far-away hoof-beat of a horse on the road, and I ran down. The dogs knew me, and seemed to understand I wished them to be quiet when I spoke to them. As the noise came nearer I went down to the gate. I was trembling with eagerness and anxiety, and I spoke before I reached it. I was sure it was Doctor Malcolm, but it was some one larger and taller, and the figure came out into the moonlight, and I was looking up at Philip Tredennis!"

Agnes laid her hand on her arm.

"Wait a moment before you go on," she said. "Give yourself time."

"No," said Bertha, hurrying, "I will go on to the end. Agnes, I have never lied to myself since that minute—never once. Where would have been the use? I thought he was forty miles away, and there he stood, and the terror and joy and anguish of seeing him swept everything else away, and I broke down. I don't know what he felt and thought. There was one strange moment when he stood quite close to me and touched my shoulder with his strong, kind hand. He seemed overwhelmed by what I did, and his voice was only a whisper. There seemed no one in all the world but ourselves, and when I lifted my face

from the gate I knew what all I had suffered meant. As he talked to me afterwards I was saying over to myself, as if it was a lesson I was learning, 'You are mad with joy just because this man is near you. All your pain has gone away. Everything is as it was before—but you don't care—you don't care.' I said that because I wished to make it sound as wicked as I could. But it was no use. I have even thought since then that if he had been a bad man, thinking of himself, I might have been saved that night by finding it out. But he was not thinking of himself—only of me. He came, not for his own sake, but for mine and Janey's. He came to help us and stand by us and care for us—to do any common, simple service for us, as well as any great one. We were not to think of him; he was to think of us. And he sent me away up stairs to sleep, and walked outside below the window all night. And I slept like a child. I should not have slept if it had been any one else, but it seemed as if he had brought strength and quietness with him, and I need not stay awake because everything was so safe. That has been his power over me from the first—that he rested me. Some-

times I have been so tired of the feverish, restless way we have of continually amusing ourselves, as if we dare not stop, and of reasoning and wondering and arguing to no end. We are all introspection and retrospection, and we call it being analytical and clever. If it is being clever, then we are too clever. One gets so tired of it—one wishes one could stop thinking and know less—or more. He was not like that, and he rested me. That was it. He made life seem more simple.

"Well, he rested me then, and, though I made one effort to send him away, I knew he would not go, and I did not try very hard. I did not want him to go. So when he refused to be sent away, an obstinate feeling came over me, and I said to myself that I would not do or say one unkind thing to him while he was there. I would be as gentle and natural with him as if—as if he had been some slight, paltry creature who was nothing, and less than nothing to me. I should have been amiable enough to such a man if I had been indebted to him for such service."

"Ah!" sighed Agnes, "but it could not end there!"

"End!" said Bertha. "There is no end,

there never will be! Do you think I do not see the bitter truth? One may call it what one likes, and make it as pathetic and as tragic and hopeless as words can paint it, but it is only the old, miserable, undignified story of a woman who is married, and who cares for a man who is not her husband. Nothing can be worse than that. It is a curious thing, isn't it, that somehow one always feels as if the woman must be bad?"

Agnes Sylvestre laid a hand on her again without speaking.

"I suppose I was bad in those days," Bertha continued. "I did not feel as if I was—though I dare say that only makes it worse. I deliberately let myself be happy. I let him be kind to me. I tried to amuse and please him. Janey got well, and the days were beautiful. I did all he wished me to do, and he was as good to me as he was to Janey. When you spoke of his being so gentle, it brought everything back to me in a rush—his voice and his look and his touch. There are so many people who, when they touch you, seem to take something from you; he always seemed to give you something—protection and sympathy and generous help. He had none of the gallant tricks of other

men, and he was often a little shy and restrained, but the night he held my hand in both his, and the moment he touched my shoulder, when I broke down so at the gate, I could not forget if I tried."

"But, perhaps," said Agnes, sadly, "you had better try."

Bertha looked up at her.

"When I have tried for a whole year," she said, "I will tell you what success I have had."

"Oh!" Agnes cried, desperately, "it will take more than a year."

"I have thought it might," said Bertha; "perhaps it may take even two."

The fire gave a fitful leap of flame, and she turned to look at it.

"The fire is going out," she said, "and I have almost finished. Do you care to hear the rest? You have been very patient to listen so long."

"Go on," Agnes said.

"Well, much as I indulged myself then I knew where I must stop, and I never really forgot that I was going to stop at a certain point. I said that I would be happy just so long as he was there, and that when we parted

that would be the end of it. I even laid out my plans, and the night before he was to go away—in the evening, after the long, beautiful day was over—I said things to him which I meant should make him distrust me. The shallowest man on earth will hate you if you make him think you are shallow, and capable of trifling as he does himself. The less a man intends to remember you the more he intends you shall remember him. It will be his religious belief that women should be true—some one should be true, you know, and it is easier to let it be the woman. What I tried to suggest that night was that my treatment of him had only been a caprice—that what he had seen of me in Washington had been the real side of my life, and that he would see it again and need not be surprised."

"Oh, Bertha!" her friend cried. "Oh, Bertha!"

And she threw both arms about her, with an intensely feminine swiftness and expressiveness.

"Yes," said Bertha, "it was not easy. I never tried anything quite so difficult before, and perhaps I did not do it well, for—he would not believe me."

There was quite a long pause, in which she leaned against Agnes, breathing quickly.

"I think that is really the end," she said at last. "It seems rather abrupt, but there is very little more. He is a great deal stronger than I am, and he is too true himself to believe lies at the first telling. One must tell them to him obstinately and often. I shall have to be persistent and consistent too."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Agnes. "What are you thinking of doing?"

"There will be a great deal to be done," she answered—"a great deal. There is only one thing which will make him throw me aside——"

"Throw you aside—you?"

"Yes. I have always been very proud—it was the worst of my faults that I was so deadly proud—but I want him to throw me aside—me! Surely one could not care for a man when he was tired and did not want one any more. That *must* end it. And there is something else. I don't know—I am not sure—I could not trust myself—but there have been times when I thought that he was beginning to care too—whether he knew it or not. I don't judge him by the other men I

have known, but sometimes there was such a look in his eyes that it made me tremble with fear and joy. And he shall not spoil his life for me. It would be a poor thing that he should give all he might give—to Bertha Amory. He had better give it to—to you, Agnes," she said, with a little tightening grasp.

"I do not want it," said Agnes, calmly. "I have done with such things, and he is not the man to change."

"He must," said Bertha, "in time—if I am very unflinching and clever. They always said I was clever, you know, and that I had wonderful control over myself. But I shall have to be very clever. The only thing which will make him throw me aside is the firm belief that I am worth nothing—the belief that I am false and shallow and selfish, and as wicked as such a slight creature can be. Let me hide the little that is good in me, and show him always, day by day, what is bad. There is enough of that, and in the end he must get tired of me, and show me that he has done with me for ever."

"You cannot do it," said Agnes, breathlessly.

"I cannot do it for long, I know that, but

I can do it for a while, and then I will make Richard let me go away—to Europe. I have asked him before, but he seemed so anxious to keep me—I cannot tell why—and I have never opposed or disobeyed him. I try to be a good wife in such things as that. I ought to be a good wife in something. Just now he has some reason for wishing me to remain here. He does not always tell me his reasons. But perhaps in the spring he will not object to my going, and one can always spend a year or so abroad; and when he joins us, as he will afterwards, he will be sure to be fascinated, and in the end we might stay away for years, and if we ever come back all will be over, and —and I shall be forgotten."

She withdrew herself from her friend's arms and rose to her feet.

"I shall be forgotten—forgotten!" she said. "Oh! how *can* I be! How can such pain pass away and end in nothing! Just while everything is at the worst, it is not easy to remember that one only counts for one after all, and that a life is such a little thing. It seems so much to oneself. And yet what does it matter that Bertha Amory's life went all wrong, and was only a bubble that was tossed

away and broken! There are such millions and millions of people that it means nothing, only to Bertha Amory, and it cannot mean anything to her very long. Only just while it lasts—and before one gets used to—to the torture of it——!"

She turned away and crossed the room to the window, drawing aside the curtain.

"There is a little streak of light in the East," she said. "It is the day, and you have not slept at all."

Agnes went to her, and they stood and looked at it together—a faint, thin line of gray tinged with palest yellow.

"To-morrow has come," said Bertha. "And we must begin the New Year properly. I must take up my visiting-book and arrange my lists. Don't—don't call any one, Agnes—it is only—faintness." And with the little protesting smile on her lips she sank to the floor.

Agnes knelt down at her side, and began to loosen her wrapper at the throat and chafe her hands.

"Yes, it is only faintness," she said in a low voice, "but if it were something more you would be saved a great deal."

## CHAPTER VI.

### PHILIP'S PERPLEXITIES.

"*On dit* that the charming Mrs. Sylvestre, so well-known and so greatly admired in society circles as Miss Agnes Wentworth, has, after several years of absence much deplored by her numberless friends, returned to make her home in Washington, having taken a house on Lafayette Square. The three years of Mrs. Sylvestre's widowhood have been spent abroad, chiefly in Italy—the land of love and beauty—where Tasso sang and Raphael dreamed of the Immortals."

Thus, the society column of a daily paper, and a week later Mrs. Merriam arrived, and the house on Lafayette Square was taken possession of.

It was one of the older houses—a large and substantial one, whose rather rigorous exterior

still held forth promises of possibilities in the way of interior development. Arbuthnot heard Bertha mention one day that one of Mrs. Sylvestre's chief reasons for selecting it was that it "looked quiet," and he reflected upon this afterwards as being rather unusual as the reason of a young and beautiful woman.

"Though after all, she 'looks quiet' herself," was his mental comment. "If I felt called upon to remark upon her at all, I should certainly say she was a perfectly composed person. Perhaps that is the groove she chooses to live in—or it may be simply her nature. I shouldn't mind knowing which."

He was rather desirous of seeing what she would make of the place inside, but the desire was by no means strong enough to lead him to make his first call upon her an hour earlier than he might have been expected according to the strictest canons of good taste.

On her part Mrs. Sylvestre found great pleasure in the days spent in establishing herself. For years her life had been an unsettled one, and the prospect of arranging a home according to her own tastes—and especially a home in Washington—was very agreeable to her. Her fortune was large,

her time was her own, and as in the course of her rambling she had collected innumerable charming and interesting odds and ends, there was no reason why her house should not be a delightful one.

For several days she was quite busy and greatly interested. She found her pictures, plaques, and hangings even more absorbing than she had imagined they would be. She spent her mornings in arranging and re-arranging cabinets, walls, and mantels, and moved about her rooms wearing a faint smile of pleasure on her lips, and a faint tinge of colour on her cheeks.

"Really," she said to Bertha, who dropped in to see her one morning, and found her standing in the middle of the room reflecting upon a pretty old blue cup and saucer, "I am quite happy in a quiet way. I seem to be shut in from the world and life, and all busy things, and to find interest enough in the colour of a bit of china or the folds of a *portière*. It seems almost exciting to put a thing on a shelf, and then take it down and put it somewhere else."

When Arbuthnot passed the house he saw that rich Eastern-looking stuffs curtained the

windows, and great Indian jars stood on the steps and balconies, as if ready for plants. In exhausting the resources of the universe, Mr. Sylvestre had given some attention to India, and being a man of caprices had not returned from his explorings empty-handed. A carriage stood before the house, and the door being open revealed glimpses of pictures and hangings in the hall, which were pleasantly suggestive.

"She will make it attractive," Arbuthnot said to himself. "That goes without saying; and she will be rather perilously so herself."

His first call upon her was always a very distinct memory to him. It was made on a rather chill and unpleasant evening, and, being admitted by a servant into the hall he had before caught a glimpse of, its picturesque comfort and warmth impressed themselves upon him in the strongest possible contrast to the raw dampness and darkness of the night. Through half-drawn *portières* he had a flitting glance at two or three rooms and a passing impression of some bright or deep point of colour on drapery, bric-à-brac, or pictures, and then he was ushered into the room in which Mrs. Sylvestre sat herself.

She had been sitting before the fire with a book upon her lap, and she rose to meet him, still holding the volume in her hand. She was dressed in violet and wore a large cluster of violets loosely at her waist. She looked very slender and tall and fair, and the rich, darkly glowing colours of the furniture and hangings formed themselves into a background for her, as if the accomplishment of that end had been the sole design of their existence. Arbuthnot even wondered if it was possible that she would ever again look so well as she did just at the instant she rose and moved forward, though he recognised the folly of the thought before ten minutes had passed.

She looked quite as well when she re-seated herself, and even better when she became interested in the conversation which followed. It was a conversation which dealt principally with the changes which had taken place in Washington during her absence from it. She found a great many.

"It strikes me as a little singular that you do not resent them more," said Arbuthnot.

"Most of them are changes for the better," she answered.

"Ah!" he returned, "but that would not make any difference to the ordinary mind—unless it awakened additional resentment. There is a sense of personal injury in recognising that improvements have been made entirely without our assistance."

"I do not feel it," was her reply, "or it is lost through my pleasure in being at home again."

"She has always thought of it as 'home,' then," was Arbuthnot's mental comment. "That is an inadvertent speech which tells a story."

His impressions of the late Mr. Sylvestre were not agreeable ones. He had heard him discussed frequently by men who had known him, and the stories told of him were not pleasant. After fifteen minutes in the crucible of impartial public opinion, his manifold brilliant gifts and undeniable graces and attainments had a habit of disappearing in vapour, and leaving behind them a residuum of cold-blooded selfishness and fine disregard of all human feelings in others, not easily disposed of. Arbuthnot had also noticed that there was but one opinion expressed on the subject of his marriage.

"He married a lovely girl twelve or fifteen years younger than himself," he had heard

a man say once. "I should like to see what he has made of her."

"You would!" ejaculated an older man. "I shouldn't! Heaven forbid!"

It added greatly to Arbuthnot's interest in her that she bore no outward signs of any conflict she might have passed through. Whatever it had been, she had borne it with courage, and kept her secret her own. The quiet of her manner was not suggestive either of sadness or self-repression, and she made no apparent effort to evade mention of her married life, though, as she spoke of herself but seldom, it seemed entirely natural that she should refer rarely to the years she had passed away from Washington.

When, a little later, Mrs. Merriam came in, she proved to be as satisfactory as all other appurtenances to the household. She was a picturesque, elderly woman, with a small, elegant figure, an acute little countenance, and large, dark eyes, which sparkled in the most amazing manner at times. She was an old Washingtonian herself, had lived through several administrations, and had made the most of her experience. She seemed to have personally known the

notabilities of half a century, and her reminiscences gave Arbuthnot a feeling of being surpassingly youthful and modern. She had been living abroad for the last seven years, and, finding herself at home once more, seemed to settle down with a sense of relief.

"It is a bad habit to get into—this of living abroad," she said. "It is a habit, and it grows on one. I went away intending to remain a year, and I should probably have ended my existence in Europe if Mrs. Sylvestre had not brought me home. I was always a little homesick, too, and continually felt the need of a new administration, but I lacked the resolution it required to leave behind me the things I had become accustomed to."

When he went away, Arbuthnot discovered that it was with her he had talked more than with Mrs. Sylvestre, and yet, while he had been in the room, it had not occurred to him that Mrs. Sylvestre was silent. Her silence was not unresponsiveness. When he looked back upon it he found that there was even something delicately inspiring in it. "It is that expression of gentle attentiveness in her eyes," he said. "It makes your most trivial remark of consequence, and convinces

you that, if she spoke, she would be sure to say what it would please you most to hear. It is a great charm."

For a few moments before returning to his rooms, he dropped in upon the Amory household.

There was no one in the parlour when he entered but Colonel Tredennis, who stood with his back to the fire, apparently plunged deep in thought, his glance fixed upon the rug at his feet. He was in evening dress, and held a pair of white gloves in his hand, but he did not wear a festive countenance. Arbuthnot thought that he looked jaded and worn. Certainly there were deep lines left on his forehead, even when he glanced up and straightened it.

"I am waiting for Mrs. Amory," he said. "Amory is out of town, and, as we were both going to the reception at the Secretary of State's, I am to accompany her. I think she will be down directly. Yes, there she is."

They saw her through the *portières* descending the staircase as he spoke. She was gleaming in creamy satin and lace, and carried a wrap over her arm. She came into the room with a soft rustle of trailing draperies,

and Tredennis stirred slightly, and then stood still.

"Did I keep you waiting very long?" she said. "I hope not," and then turned to Arbuthnot, as she buttoned her long glove deliberately.

"Richard has gone to Baltimore with a theatre party," she explained. "Miss Varien went and half a dozen others. I did not care to go; and Richard persuaded Colonel Tredennis to assume his responsibilities for the evening and take me to the Secretary of State's. The President is to be there, and as I have not yet told him that I approve of his Cabinet and don't object to his message, I feel I ought not to keep him in suspense any longer."

"Your approval will naturally remove a load of anxiety from his mind," said Arbuthnot. "Can I be of any assistance to you in buttoning that glove?"

She hesitated a second and then extended her wrist. To Arbuthnot, who had occasionally performed the service for her before, there was something novel both in the hesitation and the delicate suggestion of coquettish surrender in her gesture. It had been the chief

of her charms for him that her coquetries were of the finer and more reserved sort, and that they had never expended themselves upon him. This was something so new that his momentary bewilderment did not add to his dexterity, and the glove-buttoning was of longer duration than it would otherwise have been.

While it was being accomplished Colonel Tredennis looked on in silence. He had never buttoned a woman's glove in his life. It seemed to him that it was scarcely the thing for a man who was neither husband, brother, nor lover, to do. If there was any deep feeling in his heart, how could this careless, conventional fellow stand there and hold her little wrist and meet her lifted eyes without betraying himself. His reasoning was not very logical in its nature: it was the reasoning of pain and hot anger and other uneasy and masterful emotions, which so got the better of him that he turned suddenly away that he might not see, scarcely knowing what he did. It was an abrupt movement and attracted Arbuthnot's attention, as also did something else—a movement of Bertha's—an unsteadiness of the gloved hand which,

however, was speedily controlled or ended. He glanced at her, but only to find her smiling, though her breath came a little quickly and her eyes looked exceedingly bright.

"I am afraid you find it rather troublesome," she said.

"Extremely," he replied; "but I look upon it in the light of moral training, and, sustained by a sense of duty, will endeavour to persevere."

He felt the absurdity and triviality of the words all the more, perhaps, because as he uttered them he caught a glimpse of Tredennis's half-averted face. There was that in its jaded look which formed too sharp a contrast to inconsequent jesting.

"It is not getting easier for him," was his thought. "It won't until it has driven him harder even than it does now."

Perhaps there was something in his own humour which made him a trifle more susceptible to outward influences than usual. As has been already intimated, he had his moods, and he had felt one of them creeping upon him like a shadow during his brief walk through the dark streets.

"I hear the carriage at the door," he said,

when he had buttoned the glove. "Don't let me detain you. I am on my way home."

"You have been——?" questioned Bertha, suddenly awakening to a new interest on her own part.

"I called upon Mrs. Sylvestre," he answered.

And then he assisted her to put on her wrap and they all went out to the carriage together. When she was seated and the door closed, Bertha leaned forward and spoke through the open window.

"Don't you think the house very pretty?" she inquired.

"Very," was his brief reply, and though she seemed to expect him to add more, he did not do so, and the carriage drove away and left him standing upon the sidewalk.

"Ah!" said Bertha, leaning back with a faint smile, "he will go again and again, and yet again."

"Will he?" said the Colonel. "Let us hope he will enjoy it." But the truth was that the subject did not awaken in him any absorbing interest.

"Oh! he will enjoy it," she responded.

"And Mrs. Sylvestre?" suggested Tredennis.

"He will never be sure what she thinks of him, or what she wishes him to think of her, though she will have no caprices, and will always treat him beautifully, and the uncertainty will make him enjoy himself more than ever."

"Such a state of bliss," said the Colonel, "is indeed greatly to be envied."

He was always conscious of a rather dreary sense of bewilderment when he heard himself giving voice in his deep tones to such small change as the above remark. Under such circumstances there was suggested to him the idea that for the moment he had changed places with some more luckily facile creature and represented him but awkwardly. And yet, of late, he had found himself gradually bereft of all other conversational resource. Since the New Year's Day when Bertha had called his attention to the weather, he had seen in her no vestige of what had so moved him in the brief summer holiday in which she had seemed to forget to arm herself against him.

It appeared that his place was fixed for him, and that nothing remained but to occupy it with as good a grace as possible. But he

knew he had not borne it well at the outset. It was but nature that he should have borne it ill and have made some effort at least to understand the meaning of the change in her.

"All this goes for nothing," he had said to her, but it had not gone for nothing after all. A man who loves a woman with the whole force of his being, whether it is happily or unhappily, is not a well-regulated creature wholly under his own control. His imagination will play him bitter tricks and taunt him many an hour, both in the bright day and in the dead watches of the night, when he wakens to face his misery alone. He will see things as they are not, and be haunted by phantoms whose vague outlines torture him, while he knows their unreality.

"It is not true," he will say. "It cannot be — and yet if it should be — though it is not."

A word, a smile, the simplest glance or tone, will distort themselves until their very slightness seems the most damning proof. But that he saw his own folly and danger, there were times on those first days when Tredennis might have been betrayed by his fierce sense of injury into mistakes which

it would have been impossible for him to retrieve by any after effort. But even in the moments of his greatest weakness he refused to trifle with himself. On the night of the New Year's Day when Bertha and Agnes had sat together, he had kept a vigil too. The occupant of the room below his had heard him walking to and fro, and had laid his restlessness to a great number of New Year's calls instead of to a guilty conscience. But the Colonel had been less lenient with himself, and had fought a desperate battle in the silent hours.

"What rights have I," he had said in anguish and humiliation—"what rights have I at the best? If her heart was as tender towards me as it seems hard, that would be worse than all. It would seem then that I must tear myself from her for her sake as well as for my own. As it is I can at least be near her and torture myself and let her torture me, and perhaps some day do her some poor kindness of which she knows nothing. Only I must face the truth that I have no claim upon her—none. If she chooses to change her mood, why should I expect or demand an explanation? The wife of one man,

the—the beloved of another—Oh, Bertha! Bertha!" And he buried his face in his hands and sat so in the darkness, and in the midst of his misery he seemed to hear again the snatch of song she had sung as she sat on the hill side with her face half upturned to the blue sky.

The memory of that day and of some of those which had gone before it, cost him more than all else. It came back to him suddenly when he had reduced himself to a dead level of feeling, once or twice when he was with Bertha herself; it returned to him with such freshness and vivid truth, that it seemed for a moment that a single word would sweep every barrier away, and they would stand face to face, speaking the simple truth whatever it might be.

"Why not!" he thought. "Why not, after all, if she is unhappy and needs a friend, why should it not be the man who would bear either death or life for her?" But he said nothing of this when he spoke to her. After their first two or three interviews, he said less than ever. Each of those interviews was like the first. She talked to him as she talked to Arbuthnot, to Planefield, to the *attachés*

of the legations, to the clever newspaper man from New York or Boston, who was brought in by a friend on one of her evenings, because he wished to see if the paragraphists had overrated her attractions. She paid him graceful conventional attentions; she met him with a smile when he entered; if he was grave, she hoped he was not unwell or out of spirits; she made fine, feathery, jesting little speeches, as if she expected them to amuse him; she gave him his share of her presence, of her conversation, of her laugh, and went her way to some one else to whom she gave the same things.

"And why should I complain?" he said.

But he did complain, or some feverish, bitter ache in his soul complained for him, and wrought him all sorts of evil, and wore him out, and deepened the lines on his face, and made him feel old and hopeless. He was very kind to Janey in those days, and spent a great deal of time with her. It was Janey who was his favourite, though he was immensely liberal to Jack, and bestowed upon Meg, who was too young for him, elaborate and expensive toys, which she reduced to fragments and dissected and analysed with

her brother's assistance. He used to go to see Janey in the nursery and take her out to walk and drive, and at such times felt rather glad that she was not like her mother. She bore no likeness to Bertha, and was indeed thought to resemble the Professor, who was given to wondering at her as he had long ago wondered at her mother. The Colonel fancied that it rested him to ramble about in company with this small creature. They went to the parks, hand in hand, so often that the nurse-maids who took their charges there began to know them quite well, the popular theory among them being that the Colonel was an interesting widower, and the little one his motherless child. The winter was a specially mild one, even for Washington, and it was generally pleasant out of doors, and frequently Janey's escort sat on one of the green benches and read his paper while she disported herself on the grass near him, or found entertainment in propelling her family of dolls up and down the walk in their carriage. They had long and interesting conversations together, and once or twice even went to the Capitol itself, and visited the House and the Senate, deriving much pleasure and benefit from

looking down upon the rulers of their country "rising to points of order" in their customary awe-inspiring way. On one of these occasions, possibly overpowered by the majesty of the scene, Janey fell asleep, and an hour later, as Bertha stepped from her carriage, with cards and calling list in hand, she encountered a large, well-known figure bearing in its arms, with the most astonishing accustomed gentleness and care, a supine little form, whose head confidingly reposed on the broadest of shoulders.

"She went to sleep," said the Colonel, with quite a paternal demeanour.

He thought at first that Bertha was going to kiss the child. She made a step forward, an eager tenderness kindling in her eyes, then checked herself and laughed, half shrugging her shoulders.

"May I ask if you carried her the entire length of the Avenue in the face of the multitude?" she said. "You were very good and displayed most delightful moral courage if you did, but it must not occur again. She must not go out without a nurse, if she is so much trouble."

"She is no trouble," he answered, "and it

was not necessary to carry her the length of the Avenue."

Bertha went into the house before him.

"I will ring for a nurse," she said at the parlour door. "She will be attended to—and you are extremely amiable. I have been calling all afternoon, and have just dropped in for Richard, who is going with me to the Drummonds' *musicale*."

But Tredennis did not wait for the nurse. He knew the way to the nursery well enough, and bore off his little burden to her own domains *sans cérémonie*, while Bertha stood and watched him from below.

If she had been gay the winter before, she was gayer still now. She had her afternoon for reception and her evening at home, and gave, also, a series of more elaborate and formal entertainments. At these festivities the political element was represented quite brilliantly. She professed to have begun at last to regard politics seriously, and, though this statement was not received with the most entire confidence, the most liberal encouragement was bestowed upon her. Richard, especially, seemed to find entertainment in her whim. He even admitted that he himself took an

interest in the affairs of the nation this winter. He had been awakened to it by his intimacy with Planefield, which increased as the business connected with the Westoria lands grew upon him. There was a great deal of this business to be transacted, it appeared, though his references to the particular form of his share of it were never very definite, being marked chiefly by a brilliant vagueness which, Bertha was wont to observe, added interest to the subject.

"I should not understand if you explained it, of course," she said. "And, as I don't understand, I can give play to a naturally vivid imagination. All sorts of events may depend upon you. Perhaps it is even necessary for you to 'lobby,' and you are engaged in all sorts of machinations. How do people 'lobby,' Richard, and is there an opening in the profession for a young person of undeniable gifts and charms?"

In these days Planefield presented himself more frequently than ever. People began to expect to see his large, florid figure at the 'evenings' and dinner parties, and gradually he and his friends formed an element in them. It was a new element, and not

altogether the most delightful one. Some of the friends were not remarkable for polish of manner and familiarity with the *convenances*, and one or two of them, after they began to feel at ease, talked a good deal in rather pronounced tones, and occasionally enjoyed themselves with a freedom from the shackles of ceremony which seemed rather to belong to some atmosphere other than that of the pretty, bright parlours. But it would not have been easy to determine what Bertha thought of the matter. She accepted Richard's first rather apologetic mention of it gracefully enough, and, after a few evenings, he no longer apologised.

"They may be a trifle uncouth," he had said, "but some of them are tremendous fellows when you understand them—shrewd, far-seeing politicians, who may astonish the world any day by some sudden, brilliant move. Such men nearly always work their way from the ranks, and have had no time to study the graces—but they are very interesting, and will appreciate the attention you show them. There is that man Bowman, for instance—began life as a boy in a blacksmith's shop, and has been in Congress for years.

They would send him to the Senate if they could spare him. He is a positive mine of political information, and knows the Westoria business from beginning to end."

"They all seem to know more or less of it," said Bertha. "That is our atmosphere now. I am gradually assimilating information myself."

But Tredennis did not reconcile himself to the invasion. He looked on in restless resentment. What right had such men to be near her, was his bitter thought. Being a man himself, he knew more of some of them than he could remember without anger or distaste. He could not regard them impartially as mere forces, forgetting all else. When he saw Planefield at her side, bold, fulsome, bent on absorbing her attention and frequently succeeding through sheer thick-skinned pertinacity, he was filled with wrathful repulsion. This man at least he knew had no right to claim consideration from her, and yet somehow he seemed to have established himself in an intimacy which appeared gradually to become a part of her everyday life. This evening, on entering the house, he had met him leaving it, and when he went into the parlour he had seen

upon Bertha's little work-table the customary sumptuous offering of Jacqueminot roses. She carried the flowers in her hand now—their heavy perfume filled the carriage.

"There is no use in asking why she does it," he was thinking. "I have given up expecting to understand her. I suppose she has a reason. I won't believe it is as poor a one as common vanity or coquetry. Such things are beneath her."

He understood himself as little as he understood her. There were times when he wondered how long his unhappiness would last, and if it would not die a natural death. No man's affection and tenderness could feed upon nothing and survive, he told himself again and again. And what was there to sustain his? This was not the woman he had dreamed of—from her it should be easy enough for him to shake himself free. What to him were her cleverness, her bright eyes, her power over herself and others, the subtle charms and graces which were shared by all who came near her? They were only the gift of a finer order of coquette, who was a greater success than the rest because nature had been lavish with her. It was not these things which

could have changed and coloured all life for him. If all his thoughts of her had been mere fancies it would be only natural that he should outlive his experience, and in time look back upon it as simply an episode which might have formed a part of the existence of any man. There had been nights when he had left the house, thinking it would be far better for him never to return if he could remain away without awakening comment; but, once in the quiet of his room, there always came back to him memories and fancies he could not rid himself of, and which made the scenes he had left behind unreal. He used to think it must be this which kept his tenderness from dying a lingering death. When he was alone it seemed as if he found himself face to face again with the old, innocent ideal that followed him with tender appealing eyes and would not leave him. He began to have an odd fancy about the feeling. It was as if, when he left the silent room, he left in it all the truth and reality of his dream and found them there when he returned.

"Why do you look at me so?" Bertha said to him one night, turning suddenly aside from the group she had been the central figure of.

"You look at me as if—as if I were a ghost, and you were ready to see me vanish into thin air."

He made a slight movement as if rousing himself.

"That is it," he answered. "I am waiting to see you vanish."

"But you will not see it," she said. "You will be disappointed. I am real—real! A ghost could not laugh as I do—and enjoy itself. Its laugh would have a hollow sound. I assure you I am very real indeed."

But he did not answer her, and after looking at him with a faint smile for a second or so, she turned to her group again. To-night as they drove to their destination, once or twice in passing a street-lamp, the light flashing into the carriage showed him that Bertha leaned back in her corner with closed eyes, her flowers lying untouched on her lap. He thought she seemed languid and pale, though she had not appeared so before they left the house. And this touched him as such things always did. There was no moment, however deep and fierce his bewildered sense of injury might have been before it, when a shade of pallor on her

cheek, or of sadness in her eyes, a look or tone of weariness, would not undo everything, and stir all his great heart with sympathy and the tender longing to be kind to her. The signs of sadness or pain in any human creature would have moved him, but such signs in her overwhelmed him and swept away every other feeling but this yearning desire to shield and care for her. He looked at her now with anxious eyes and bent forward to draw up her wrap which had slipped from her shoulders.

"Are you warm enough, Bertha?" he said with awkward gentleness. "It is a raw night. You should have had more—more shawls—or whatever they are."

She opened her eyes with a smile.

"More shawls!" she said. "We don't wear shawls now when we go to receptions. They are not becoming enough even when they are very grand indeed. This is not a shawl, it is a *sortie du bal*, and a very pretty one, but I think I am warm enough, thank you, and it was very good in you to ask." And though he had not known that his own voice was gentle, he recognised that hers was.

"Somebody ought to ask," he answered. And just then they turned the corner into a street already crowded with carriages, and their own drew up before the lighted front of a large house. Tredennis got out and gave Bertha his hand. As she emerged from the shadow of the carriage, the light fell upon her again and he was impressed even more forcibly than before with her pallor.

"You would have been a great deal better at home," he said, impetuously. "Why did you come here?"

She paused a second, and it seemed to him as if she suddenly gave up some tense hold she had previously kept upon her external self. There was only the pathetic little ghost of a smile in her lifted eyes.

"Yes, I should be better at home," she said, almost in a whisper. "I would rather be asleep with—with the children."

"Then why in heaven's name do you go?" he protested. "Bertha, let me take you home and leave you to rest. It must be so—I——"

But the conventionalities did not permit that he should give way to the fine masculine impulse which might have prompted him in

the heat of his emotions to return her to the carriage by the sheer strength of his unaided arm, and he recognised his own tone of command, and checked himself with a rueful sense of helplessness.

"There is the carriage of the French minister," said Bertha, "and madame wonders who detains her. But—if I were a regiment of soldiers, I am sure I should obey you when you spoke to me in such a tone as that."

And as if by magic she was herself again, and, taking her roses from him, went up the carpeted steps lightly and with a gay rustle of trailing silk and lace.

The large rooms inside were crowded with a distinguished company made up of the material which forms the foundation of every select Washingtonian assemblage. There were the politicians, military and naval men, *attachés* of legations, foreign ministers and members of the cabinet, with their wives and daughters, or other female relatives. A distinguished scientist loomed up in one corner, looking disproportionately modest; a well-known newspaper man chatted in another. The Chinese minister, accompanied by his interpreter, received with a slightly wearied

air of quiet patience the conversational attentions proffered him. The wife of the Sécretary of State stood near the door with her daughter, receiving her guests as they entered. She was a kindly and graceful woman, whose good breeding and self-poise had tided her safely over the occasionally somewhat ruffled social waters of two administrations. She had received a hundred or so of callers each Wednesday—the majority of them strangers, and in the moments of her greatest fatigue and lassitude had endeavoured to remember that each one of them was a human being, endowed with human vanity and sensitiveness; she had not flinched before the innocent presumption of guileless ignorance; she had done her best by timorousness and simplicity; she had endeavoured to remember hundreds of totally uninteresting people, and if she had forgotten one of them who modestly expected a place in her memory, had made an effort to repair the injury with aptness and grace. She had given up pleasures she enjoyed and repose she needed, and had managed to glean entertainment and interesting experience by the way, and in course of time, having occupied for years one of the

the heat of his emoti[illegible] the land, and do[illegible]k carriage by the s[illegible]lt and laborious wor[illegible] arm, and he [illegible] and gracefully, mor[illegible] command, ar[illegible]retting, and would look sense of h[illegible]perience more as an episode

"Ther[illegible]'s career than her own. minist[illegible]ne of the few women who pro- who [illegible] Professor Herrick neither mild of [illegible]on nor mental bewilderment. He v[illegible] been a friend of her husband's in his [illegible], and during their residence in Washing- [illegible] had been his habit to desert his books [illegible] entomological specimens once or twice in the season for the purpose of appearing in their parlours. There was a legend that he had once presented himself with a large and valuable beetle pinned to the lappel of his coat, he having absent-mindedly placed it in that conspicuous position in mistake for the flower Bertha had suggested he should decorate himself with.

He was among the guests to-night, her hostess told Bertha, as she shook hands with her.

"We were very much pleased to see him, though we do not think he looks very well," she said. "I think you will find him

ng to Professor Borrowdale, who has just ed from Central America."

He gave Bertha a kind glance of scrutiny.

"Are *you* looking very well?" she said. "I am afraid you are not. That is not a good way to begin a season."

"I am afraid," said Bertha, laughing, "that I have not chosen my dress well. Colonel Tredennis told me, a few moments ago, that I ought to be at home."

They passed on shortly afterwards, and, on the way to the other room, Bertha was unusually silent. Tredennis wondered what she was thinking of, until she suddenly looked up at him and spoke.

"Am I so very haggard?" she said.

"I should not call it haggard," he answered. "You don't look very well."

She gave her cheek a little rub with her gloved hand.

"No; you should not call it haggard," she said, "that is true. It is bad enough not to look well. One should always have a little rouge in one's pocket. But you will see that the excitement will do me good."

"Will it, Bertha?" said the Colonel.

But, whether the effect it produced upon

her was a good or bad one, it was certainly strong enough. The room was full of people she knew or wished to know. She was stopped at every step by those who spoke to her, exchanging gay speeches with her, paying her compliments, giving her greeting. Dazzling young dandies forgot their indifference to the adulation of the multitude, in their eagerness to make their bows and their *bon mots* before her; their elders and superiors were as little backward as themselves, and in a short time she had gathered quite a little court about her, in which there was laughter and badinage, and an exhilarating exchange of gaieties. The celebrated scientist joined the circle, the newspaper man made his way into it, and a stately, gray-haired member of the Supreme Bench relaxed his grave face in it, and made more clever and gallant speeches than all his younger rivals put together; it was even remarked that the Oriental visage of the Chinese ambassador himself exhibited an expression of more than slight curiosity and interest. He addressed a few words to his interpreter as he passed. But somehow Colonel Tredennis found himself on the outer edge of the enchanted ground. It was his

own fault, perhaps. Yes, it was his own fault, without a doubt. Such changes were too rapid for him, as he himself had said before. He did not understand them; they bewildered and wounded him, and gave him a sense of insecurity, seeming to leave him nothing to rely on. Was it possible that sadness or fatigue which could be so soon set aside and lost sight of could be very real? And if these things which had so touched his heart were unreal and caprices of the moment, what was there left which might not be unreal too? Could she look pale, and make her voice and her little hand tremulous at will when she chose to produce an effect, and why should it please her to produce effects upon him? She had never cared for him, or shown kindness or friendly feeling for him, but in those few brief days in Virginia. Was she so flippant, such a coquette and trifler that, when there was no one else to play her pretty tricks upon, she must try them on him and work upon his sympathies in default of being able to teach him the flatteries and follies of men who loved her less. He had heard of women who were so insatiable in their desire for sensation that they would stoop

to such things, but he did not believe he had ever met one. Perhaps he had met several, and had been too ingenuous and generous to understand their wiles and arts. At any rate, they had always been myths to him, and it seemed to him that he himself, as well as all existence, must have changed when he could even wonder if such a thing might be true of Bertha. But nothing could be more certain than that there were no longer any traces of her weariness about her. A brilliant colour glowed in her cheeks, her eyes were as bright as diamonds, there was something—some vividness about her before which every other woman in the room paled a little, though there were two or three great beauties present, and she had never taken the attitude of a beauty at all. The Colonel began to see, at last, that there was a shade of something else, too, in her manner, from which it had always before been free. In the midst of all her frivolities she had never been reckless, and there had never been any possibility that the looker-on could bear away with him any memory which had not the charm of fineness about it. But to-night, as one man hung over her chair, and others stood around and

about it, one holding her fan, another wearing in his coat a rose which had fallen from her bouquet, all sharing her smiles and vying with each other in their efforts to win them, Tredennis turned away more than once with a heavy heart.

"I would go home if I could leave her," he said. "I don't want to see this. I don't know what it means. This is no place for me."

But he could not leave her, and so lingered about and looked on, and when he was spoken to answered briefly and abstractedly, scarcely knowing what he said. There was no need that he should have felt himself desolate, since there were numbers of pretty and charming women in the rooms who would have been pleased to talk to him, and who, indeed, showed something of this kindly inclination when they found themselves near him; his big, soldierly figure, his fine sun-browned face, his grave manner and the stories they heard of him, made him an object of deep interest to women, though he had never recognised the fact. They talked of him and wondered about him, and made up suitable little romances which accounted for his silence and rather

stern air of sadness. The favourite theory was that he had been badly treated in his early youth by some soulless young person totally unworthy of the feeling he had lavished upon her, and there were two or three young persons —perhaps even a larger number—who, secretly conscious of their own worthiness of any depth of affection, would not have been loth to bind up his wounds and pour oil upon them and frankincense and myrrh, if such applications would have proved effectual. There were among these some very beautiful and attractive young creatures indeed, and as their parents usually shared their interest in the Colonel, he was invited to kettledrums and *musicales* and theatre parties and dinners, and always welcomed warmly when he was encountered anywhere. But though he received these attentions with the simple courtesy and modest appreciation of all kindness which were second nature with him, and though he paid his party calls with the most unflinching conventional promptness, and endeavoured to return the hospitalities in masculine fashion by impartially sending bouquets to mammas and daughters alike, it frequently happened that various reasons prevented his appearing

at the parties; or if he appeared he disappeared quite early; and, indeed, if he had been any other man he would have found it difficult to make his peace with the young lady who discovered that the previous engagement which had kept him away from her kettledrum had been a promise made to little Janey Amory that he would take her to see Tom Thumb.

"It is very kind in you to give us any of your time at all," Bertha had said to him once, "when you are in such demand. Richard tells me your table is strewn with invitations, and that there is not a belle of his acquaintance who is so besieged with attentions. Mr. Arbuthnot is filled with envy. He has half a dozen new songs which he plays without music, and he has learned all the new dances, and yet is not invited half so much."

"It is my conversational powers they want," was the Colonel's sardonic reply.

"That goes without saying," responded Bertha. "And if you would only condescend to waltz, poor Laurence's days of usefulness would be over. Won't you be persuaded to let me give you a lesson?"

And she came towards him with mocking in her eyes and her hands extended.

But the Colonel blushed up to the roots of his hair and did not take them.

"I should tread on your slippers, and knock off the buckles, and grind them into powder," he said. "I should tear your gown and lacerate your feelings, and you could not go to the German to-night. I am afraid I am not the size for waltzing."

"You are the size for anything and everything," said Bertha, with an exaggerated little obeisance. "It is we who are so small that we appear insignificant by contrast."

This, indeed, was the general opinion, that his stalwart proportions were greatly to his advantage, and only to be admired. Among those who admired them most were graceful young waltzers, who would have given up that delightful and exhilarating exercise on any occasion, if Colonel Tredennis would have sat out with them in some quiet corner, where the eyes of a censorious world might be escaped. Several such were present to-night, and cast slightly wistful glances at him as they passed to and fro, or deftly managed to arrange little opportunities for conversations which, however, did not flourish and grow strong even when the opportunities were made. It was

not an entertainment of this sort—innocent and agreeable as it might be—that Colonel Tredennis wanted. It would be difficult to say exactly what he *wanted*, indeed, or what satisfaction he obtained from standing gnawing his great moustache among Mrs. Amory's more versatile and socially gifted adorers.

He did not want to be a witness of her coquetries—they were coquetries, though to the sophisticated they might appear only delightful ones, and a very proper exercise of feminine fascination upon their natural prey; but to this masculine prude, who unhappily loved her and had no honest rights in her, and whose very affection was an emotion against which his honour must struggle, it was a humiliation that others should look on and see that she could so amuse herself.

So he stood on the outer edge of the little circle, and was so standing when he first caught sight of the Professor at the opposite end of the room. He left his place then and went over to him. The sight of the refined, gentle old face brought to him something bordering on a sense of relief. It removed a little of his totally unreasonable feeling of friendlessness and isolation.

"I have been watching you across the room," the Professor said kindly. "I wondered what you were thinking about. You looked fierce, my boy, and melancholy. I think there were two or three young ladies who thought you very picturesque as you stared at the floor and pulled your moustache, but it seemed to me that your air was hardly gay enough for a brilliant occasion."

"I was thinking I was out of place and wishing I was at home," replied the Colonel, with a short laugh, unconsciously pulling his moustache again. "And I dare say I was wishing I had Mrs. Amory's versatility of gifts and humour. I thought she was tired and unwell when I helped her out of the carriage; but it seems that I was mistaken, or that the atmosphere of the great world has a most inspiring effect."

The Professor turned his spectacles upon the corner Tredennis had just left.

"Ah!" he remarked quietly, "it is Bertha, is it? I fancied it might be, though it was not easy to see her face, on account of the breadth of Commander Barnacles' back. And it was you who came with her?"

"Yes," said Tredennis.

"I rather expected to see Mr. Arbuthnot," said the Professor. "I think Richard gave me the impression that I should."

"We saw Mr. Arbuthnot just before we left the house," returned the Colonel. "He had been calling upon Mrs. Sylvestre."

"Upon Mrs. Sylvestre!" echoed the Professor, and then he added rather softly, "Ah, she is another."

"Another!" Tredennis repeated.

"I only mean," said the Professor, "that I am at my old tricks again. I am wondering what will happen now to that beautiful, graceful young woman."

He turned his glance a little suddenly upon Tredennis's face.

"Have you been to see her?" he inquired.

"Not yet."

"Why not yet?"

"Perhaps because she is too beautiful and graceful," Tredennis answered. "I don't know of any other reason. I have not sufficient courage."

"Mr. Arbuthnot has sufficient courage," said the Professor. "And some of those gentlemen across the room would not shrink from the ordeal. They will all go to see her—Commander

Barnacles included—and she will be kind to them every one. She would be kind to me if I went to see her—and some day I think I shall."

He glanced across at Bertha. She was talking to Commander Barnacles, who was exhibiting as much chivalric vivacity as his breadth would allow. The rest of her circle were listening and laughing, people outside it were looking at her with interest and curiosity.

"She is very gay to-night," the Professor added. "And I dare say Mrs. Sylvestre could give us a better reason for her gaiety than we can see on the surface."

"Is there always a reason?" said the Colonel. For the moment he was pleasing himself with the fancy that he was hardening his heart.

But just at this moment a slight stir at one of the entrances attracted universal attention. The President had come in and was being welcomed by his host and hostess. He presented to the inspection of those to whom he was not already a familiar object, the unimposing figure of a man past middle life, his hair grizzled, his face lined, his expression a somewhat fatigued one.

"Yes, he looks tired," said Bertha to the newspaper man who stood near her, "though

it is rather unreasonable in him. He has nothing to do but satisfy the demands of two political parties who hate each other, and to retrieve the blunders made during a few score years by his predecessors, and he has four years to do it in—and every one will give him advice. I wonder how he likes it, and if he realises what has happened to him. If he were a king and had a crown to look at and try on in his moments of uncertainty, or if he were obliged to attire himself in velvet and ermine occasionally, he might persuade himself that he was real; but how can he do so when he never wears anything but an ordinary coat and cannot cut people's heads off, or bowstring them, and hasn't a dungeon about him. Perhaps he feels as if he is imposing on us and is secretly a little ashamed of himself. I wonder if he is not haunted by a disagreeable ghost who persists in reminding him of the day when he will only be an abject ex-President and we shall pity where we don't condemn him. And he will be dragged to the Capitol in the triumphal car of the new one and know that he has awakened from his dream—or, perhaps, he will call it a nightmare and be glad it is over."

"That is Planefield who came in with him," said her companion. "He would not object to suffer from a nightmare of the same description."

"Would he be willing to dine off the indigestibles most likely to produce it?" said Bertha. "You have indigestibles on your political *menu*, I suppose. I have heard so, and that they are not always easy to swallow because the cooks at the Capitol differ so about the flavouring."

"Planefield would not differ," was the answer. "And he would dine off them, and breakfast and sup off them, and get up in the night to enjoy them, if he could only bring about the nightmare."

"Is there any possibility that he will accomplish it?" Bertha inquired. "If there is, I must be very kind to him when he comes to speak to me. I feel a sort of eagerness to catch his eye and nod and beck and bestow wreathed smiles upon him already; but don't let my modest thrift waste itself upon a mere phantasy if the prospect is that the indigestibles will simply disagree with him and will *not* produce the nightmare." And the Colonel, who was just approaching with the Professor,

heard her, and was not more greatly elated than before.

It was not very long, of course, before there was an addition to the group. Senator Planefield found his way to it—to the very centre of it, indeed—and so long as it remained a group formed a permanent feature in its attractions. When he presented himself Bertha gave him her hand with a most bewitching little smile, whose suggestion of archness was somehow made to include the gentleman with whom she had previously been talking. Her manner was so gracious and inspiring that Planefield was intoxicated by it and wondered what it meant. He was obliged to confess to himself that there were many occasions when she was not so gracious, and if he had been easily rebuffed, the wounds his flourishing and robust vanity received might have led him to retire from the field. Frequently, when he was most filled with admiration of her cleverness and spirit, he was conscious of an uneasy sense of distrust, not only of her, but of himself. There was one special, innocent and direct gaze of which her limpid eyes were capable, which sometimes made him turn hot and cold with uncertainty,

and there was also a peculiarly soft and quiet tone in her voice which invariably filled him with perturbation.

"She's such a confounded cool little devil," he had said gracefully to a friend on one occasion when he was in a bad humour. "She's afraid of nothing, and she's got such a hold on herself that she can say anything she likes, with a voice as soft as silk, and look you straight in the eyes like a baby while she does so; and when you say the words over to yourself you can't find a thing to complain of, while you know they drove home like knives when she said them herself. She looks like a school-girl half the time, but she's made up of steel and iron, and—the devil knows what."

She did not look like a school-girl this evening—she was far too brilliant and self-possessed and entertaining; but he had nothing to complain of and plenty to congratulate himself upon. She allowed him to take the chair near her which its occupant reluctantly vacated for him; she placed no obstacles in the way of his conversational desires, and she received all his jokes with the most exhilarating laughter.

Perhaps it was because of all this that he thought he had never seen her so pretty, so well dressed, and so inspiring. When he told her so, in a clumsy whisper, a sudden red flushed her cheek, her eyes fell, and she did not reply, as he had feared she would, with a keen little two-edged jest far more discouraging than any displeasure at his boldness would have been. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses, and found it necessary to remain silent a few seconds to give himself time to recover his equilibrium. It was he who was with her when Tredennis saw her presentation to the President, who, it was said, had observed her previously and was pleased, after the interview was over, to comment admiringly upon her and ask various questions concerning her. It doubtless befell his Excellency to be called upon to be gracious and ready of speech when confronted with objects less inspiring than this young person, and it might have been something of this sort which caused him to wear a more relaxed countenance and smile more frequently than before when conversing with her, and also to appear to be in

no degree eager to allow her to make her bow and withdraw.

It was just after she had been permitted to make this obeisance and retire that Colonel Tredennis, standing near a group of three persons, heard her name mentioned and had his ears quickened by the sound.

The speakers were a man and two women.

"Her name," he heard a feminine voice say, "is Amory. She is a little married woman who flirts."

"Oh!" exclaimed the man, "that is Mrs. Amory, is it—the little Mrs. Amory. And—yes—that is Planefield with her now. He generally is with her, isn't he?"

"At present," was the answer. "Yes."

The Colonel felt his blood warming. He began to think he recognised the voice of the first speaker, and when he turned found he was not mistaken. It belonged to the "great lady" who had figured prominently in the cheery little encounter whose story had been related with such vivacity the first evening he had dined with the Amorys. She had, perhaps, not enjoyed this encounter as impartially as had her opponent, and had probably not forgotten it so soon. She wore the counte-

nance of a woman with an excellent memory, and not totally devoid of feminine prejudice. Perhaps she had been carrying her polished little stone in her pocket, and turning it occasionally ever since the memorable occasion when justice had been meted out to her not so largely tempered with mercy as the faultless in character might have desired.

"The matter gives rise to all the more comment," she remarked, "because it is something no one would have expected. Her family is entirely respectable. She was a Miss Herrick, and though she has always been a gay little person she has been quite cleverly prudent. Her acquaintances are only just beginning to realise the state of affairs, and there is a great division of opinion, of course. The Westoria lands have dazzled the husband, it is supposed, as he is a person given to projects, and he has dazzled her—and the admirer is to be made use of."

The man—a quiet elderly man, with an astutely humorous countenance, glanced after Bertha as she disappeared into the supper-room. She held her roses to her face, and her eyes smiled over them as Planefield bent to speak to her.

"It is a tremendous affair—that Westoria business," he said. "And it is evident she has dazzled the admirers. There is a good deal of life and colour, and—and audacity about her, isn't there?"

"There is plenty of audacity," responded his companion with calmness. "I think that would be universally admitted, though it is occasionally referred to as wit and self-possession."

"But she has been very much liked," timorously suggested the third member of the group, who was younger and much less imposing. "And—and I feel sure I have heard women admire her as often as men."

"A great deal may be accomplished by cleverness and prudence of that particular kind," was the answer. "And, as I said, she has been both prudent and clever."

"It isn't pleasant to think about," remarked the man. "She will lose her friends and—and all the rest of it, and may gain nothing in the end. But I suppose there is a good deal of that sort of thing going on here. We outsiders hear it said so, and are given to believing the statement."

"It does not usually occur in the class to

which this case belongs," was the response. "The female lobbyist is generally not so—not so——"

"Not so picturesque as she is painted," ended her companion with a laugh. "Well, I consider myself all the more fortunate in having seen this one who is picturesque, and has quite a charming natural colour of her own."

## CHAPTER VII.

### REMONSTRANCE.

THEY moved away and went to the supper-room themselves, leaving Tredennis to his reflections. What these were he scarcely knew himself for a few seconds. The murmur of voices and passing to and fro confused him. For half an hour of quiet in some friendly corner, where none could see his face, he felt that he would have given a year or so of his life—perhaps a greater number of years than a happier man would have been willing to part with. It was of Bertha these people had been speaking—of Bertha, and it was Bertha he could see through the opened doors of the supper-room, eating ices, listening to compliment and laughter and jest! It was Planefield who was holding her flowers, and the man who had just picked up her fan was one of

his friends; in two or three others near her, Tredennis recognised his associates: it seemed as if the ground had been ceded to them by those who had at first formed her little court.

Tredennis was seized with a wild desire to make his way into their midst, take her hand in his arm, and compel her to come away—to leave them all, to let him take her home—to safety and honour and her children. He was so filled with the absurd impulse that he took half a step forward, stopping and smiling bitterly, when he realised what he was prompted to do.

"How she would like it," he thought, "and like me for doing it; and what a paragraph it would make for the society column!"

Incidents which had occurred within the last few weeks came back to him with a significance they had never before borne. Speeches and moods of Richard's, things he had done, occasional unconscious displays of eagerness to please Planefield and cultivate him, his manner towards Bertha, and certain touches of uneasiness when she was not at her best.

From the first the Colonel had not felt himself as entirely prepossessed by this amiable and charming young man as he desired to be, and he had been compelled to admit that he was not always pleased by his gay good humour, evanescent enthusiasms, and by his happy irresponsible fashion of looking at life. When he had at last made this confession to himself he had not shrunk from giving himself an explanation of the matter, from which a nature more sparing of itself would have flinched. He had said that his prejudice was one to blush at and conquer by persistent effort, and he had done his sternly honest best to subdue it. But he had not succeeded as he had hoped he should. When he fancied he was making progress and learning to be fair, some trifle continually occurred which made itself an obstacle in his path. He saw things he did not wish to see, and heard things he did not wish to hear—little things which made him doubt and ponder, and which somehow he could not shake off, even when he tried to forget them and persuade himself that after all they were of slight significance. And as he had seen more of the gay good humour and readiness to be moved, his first shadowy

feeling had assumed more definite form. He had found himself confronted by a distrust which grew upon him; he had met the young man's smiling eyes with a sense of being repelled by their very candour and brightness; he had learned that they were not so candid as they seemed, and that his boyish frankness was not always to be relied upon. He had discovered that he was ready to make a promise and forget it; that his impressionable mind could shift itself and change its colour, and that somehow its quickness of action had a fashion of invariably tending towards the accomplishment of some personal end—a mere vagary or graceful whim, perhaps, but always a fancy pertaining to the indulgence of self. Tredennis had heard him lie—not wickedly or awkwardly, so far—but with grace and freedom from embarrassment. It was his accidental detection of one of the most trivial and ready of these falsehoods which had first roused him to distrust. He remembered now, as by a flash, that it had been a lie about Planefield, and that it had been told to Bertha. He had wondered at the time what its object could be; now he thought he saw, and in a measure comprehended the short-sighted folly

which had caused the weak, easily swayed nature to drift into such danger.

"He does not realise what he is doing," was his thought. "He would lie to me if I assured him of it."

Of these two things he was convinced—that the first step had been merely one of many whims, whatever the results following might be, and that no statement or promise Amory might make could be relied on. There was no knowing what he had done or what he would do. As he had found entertainment in the contents of the "museum," so it was as probable he had, at the outset, amused himself with his fancies concerning the Westoria lands, which had, at last, so far fascinated and dazed him as to lead him into the committal of follies he had not paused to excuse even to himself. He had not thought it necessary to excuse them. Why should he not take the legal business in hand, and since there was no reason against that, why should he not also interest himself in the investigations and be on intimate terms with the men who were a part of the brilliant project? Why should not his wife entertain them, as she entertained the rest of her friends and acquaintances?

Tredennis felt that he had learned enough of the man's mental habits to follow him pretty closely in his reasoning—when he reasoned. While he had looked on silently, the Colonel had learned a great deal and grown worldly-wise and quicker of perception than he could have believed possible in times gone by. He was only half conscious that this was because he had now an object in view which he had not had before—that he was alert and watchful because there was some one he wished to shield —that he was no longer indifferent to the world and its ways, no longer given to underrating its strength and weaknesses, its faults and follies, because he wished to be able to defend himself against them, if such a thing should become necessary. He had gained wisdom enough to appreciate the full significance of the low-voiced, apparently carelessly uttered words he had just heard; and to feel his own almost entire helplessness in the matter. To appeal to Amory would be useless; to go to the Professor impossible; how could he carry to him such a story, unless it assumed proportions such as to make the step a last terrible resource? He had been looking older and acknowledging himself

frailer during the last year; certainly he was neither mentally nor physically in the condition to meet such a blow, if it was possible to spare it to him.

Tredennis looked across the room at Bertha again. It seemed that there was only one very simple thing he could do now.

"She will probably be angry and think I have come to interfere, if I go to her," he said, "but I will go nevertheless. At least, I am not one of them—every one knows that—and perhaps it will occur to her to go home."

There was resolution on his face when he approached her. He wore the look which never failed to move her more strongly than any other thing on earth had ever done before, and whose power over her cost her all the resistance of which she was capable. It had sometimes made her wonder if, after all, it was true that women liked to be subdued —to be ruled a little—if their rulers were gentle as well as strong. She had heard it said so, and had often laughed at the sentiment of the popular fallacy. She used to smile at it when it presented itself to her even in this manner; but there had been

occasions—times perhaps when she was very tired—when she had known that she would have been glad to give way before this look, to obey it, to feel the relief of deciding for herself no more.

Such a feeling rose within her now. She looked neither tired nor worn; but a certain deadly sense of fatigue, which was becoming a physical habit with her, had been growing upon her all the evening. The colour on her cheeks was feverish, her limbs ached, her eyes were bright with her desperate eagerness to sustain herself. Once or twice, when she had laughed or spoken, she had been conscious of such an unnatural tone in her voice that her heart had trembled with fear lest others should have heard it too. It seemed impossible to her that they should not, and that these men who listened and applauded her should not see that often she scarcely heard them, and that she dared not stop for fear of forgetting them altogether and breaking down in some dreadful way, which would show that all her spirit and gaiety was a lie, and only a lie poorly acted, after all.

She thought she knew what Tredennis had come to her for. She had not lost sight

of him at any time. She had known where he stood or sat, and whom he spoke to, and had known that he had seen her also. She had met his eyes now and then, and smiled and looked away again—beginning to talk to her admirers with more spirit than ever each time. What else was there to do but go on as she had begun? She knew only too well what reason there was in herself that she should not falter. If it had been strong yesterday, it was ten times stronger to-day, and would be stronger to-morrow and for many a bitter day to come. But when he came to her she only smiled up at him, as she would have smiled at Planefield, or the gallant and spacious Barnacles, or any other of the men she knew.

"I hope you have had a pleasant evening," she said. "You enjoy things of this sort so much, however, that you are always safe. I saw you talking in the most vivacious manner to that pretty Miss Stapleton—the one with the eyelashes—or rather you were listening vivaciously. You are such a good listener."

"That's an accomplishment, isn't it?" said Planefield, with his easy air.

"It is a gift of the gods," she answered. "And it was bestowed on Colonel Tredennis."

"There *are* talkers, you know," suggested the Senator, "who would make a good listener of a man without the assistance of the gods."

"Do you mean the Miss Stapleton with the eyelashes?" inquired Bertha blandly.

"Oh, come now," was the response. "I think you know I don't mean the Miss Stapleton with the eyelashes. If I did, it would be more economical to make the remark to her."

"Ah!" said Bertha, blandly again. "You mean me? I hoped so. Thank you very much. And I am glad you said it before Colonel Tredennis, because it may increase his confidence in me, which is not great. I am always glad when any one pays me a compliment in his presence."

"Does he never pay you compliments himself?" asked Planefield.

Bertha gave Tredennis a bright, full glance.

"Did you ever pay me a compliment?" she said. "Will you ever pay me a compliment —if I should chance to deserve one?"

"Yes," he answered, his face unsmiling, his

voice inflexible. "May I begin now? You always deserve them. My only reason for failing to pay them is because I am not equal to inventing such as would be worthy of you. Your eyes are like stars—your dress is the prettiest in the room—every man present is your slave and every woman pales before you —the President is going home now only because you have ceased to smile upon him."

The colour on Bertha's cheek faded a little, but her smile did not. She checked him with a gesture.

"Thank you," she said, "that will do! You are even better than Senator Planefield. My eyes are like stars, my dress is perfection! I myself am as brilliant as—as the chandelier! Really, there seems nothing left for me to do but to follow the President, who, as you said, has been good enough to take his leave and give us permission to retire." And she rose from her chair.

She made her adieus to Planefield, who bestowed upon Tredennis a sidelong scowl, thinking that it was he who was taking her away. It consoled him but little that she gave him her hand—in a most gracious farewell. He had been enjoying himself as he

did not often enjoy himself, and the sight of the Colonel's unresponsive countenance filled him with silent rage. It happened that it was not the first time, or even the second, that this gentleman had presented himself inopportunely.

"The devil take his grim airs!" was his cordial mental exclamation. "What does he mean by them, and what is he always turning up for, when no one wants to see him?"

Something of this amiable sentiment was in his expression, but the Colonel did not seem to see it; his countenance was as unmoved as ever when he led his charge away, her little hand resting on his arm. In truth, he was thinking of other things. Suddenly he had made up his mind that there was one effort he could make: that, if he could conquer himself and his own natural feeling of reluctance, he might speak to Bertha herself in such words as she would be willing to listen to and reflect upon. It seemed impossible to tell her all, but surely he might frame such an appeal as would have some small weight with her. It was not an easy thing to do. He must present himself to her in the *rôle* of an

individual who, having no right to interfere with her actions, still took upon himself to do so; who spoke when it would have seemed better taste to be silent; who delivered homilies with the manner of one who thought himself faultless, and so privileged to preach and advise.

"But what of that?" he said, checking himself impatiently in the midst of these thoughts. "I am always thinking of myself, and of how I shall appear in her eyes! Am I a boy lover trying to please her, or a man who would spare and shield her? Let her think poorly of me if she chooses—if she will only listen and realise her danger when her anger is over."

The standard for his own conduct which he had set up was not low, it will be observed. All that he demanded of himself was utter freedom from all human weakness, and even liability to temptation: an unselfishness without blemish, a self-control without flaw; that he should bear his own generous anguish without the movement of a muscle; that he should wholly ignore the throbbing of his own wounds, remembering only the task he had set himself; that his watchfulness over

himself should never falter, and his courage never be shaken. It was, perhaps, indicative of a certain degree of noble simplicity that he demanded this of himself, which he would have asked of no other human creature, and that at no time did the thought cross his mind that the thing he demanded was impossible of attainment. When he failed, as he knew he often did—when he found it difficult to efface himself utterly from his own thoughts and was guilty of the weakness of allowing himself to become a factor in them—when his unhappiness was stronger than himself—when he was stirred to resentment or conscious of weariness, and the longing to utter some word which would betray him and ask for pity, he never failed to condemn himself in bitterness of spirit as ignoble and unworthy.

"Let her be angry with me if she chooses," he thought now. "It is for me to say my say, and leave the rest to her—and I will try to say it kindly."

He would set aside the bitter feeling and resentment of her trifling, which had beset him more than once during the evening; he would forget them, as it was but right and just that they should be forgotten. When he

spoke as they went up the staircase together, his tone was so kind that Bertha glanced up at him, and saw that his face had changed, and, though still grave, was kind too. When she joined him after leaving the cloak-room, he spoke to her of her wrap again, and asked her to draw it more closely about her; when he helped her into the carriage, there was that in his light touch which brought back to her with more than its usual strength the familiar sense of quiet protection and support.

"It would be easier," she thought, "if he would be angry. Why is he not angry? He was an hour ago—and surely I have done enough."

But he showed no signs of disapproval—he was determined that he would not do that—though their drive was rather a silent one again. And yet, by the time they reached home, Bertha was in some indefinite way prepared for the question he put to her as he assisted her to alight.

"May I come in for a little while?" he asked. "I know it is late, but—there is something I must say to you."

"Something you must say to me," she repeated. "I am sure it must be something

interesting and something I should like to hear. Come in, by all means."

So they entered the house together, and went into the parlour. They found a fire burning there, and Bertha's chair drawn up before it. She loosened her wrap rather deliberately and threw it off, and then sat down as deliberately, arranging her footstool and draperies until she had attained the desired amount of languid comfort in her position. Tredennis did not speak until she was settled. He leaned against the mantel, his eyes bent on the fire.

Being fairly arranged, Bertha held out her hand.

"Will you give me that feather screen, if you please?" she said; "the one made of peacock feathers. When one attains years of discretion, one has some care for one's complexion. Did it ever occur to you how serious such matters are, and that the difference between being eighteen and eighty is almost wholly a matter of complexion? If one could remain pink and smooth, one might possibly overcome the rest, and there would be no such thing as growing old. It is not a single plank which is between ourselves and eternity,

but a— Would the figure of speech appear appropriate if one said 'a single cuticle'? I am afraid not."

He took the screen from its place and regarded it a little absently.

"You had this in your hand the first night I came here," he said, "when you told the story of your great lady."

She took it from him.

"That was a pretty little story," she said. "It was a dear little story. My great lady was present to-night. We passed and repassed each other, and gazed placidly at each other's eyebrows. We were vaguely haunted by a faint fancy that we might have met before; but the faculties become dimmed with advancing years, and we could not remember where or how it happened. One often feels that one has met people, you know."

She balanced her gleaming screen gracefully, looking at him from under its shadow.

"And it is not only on account of my complexion that I want my peacock feathers," she continued, dropping her great lady by the way as if she had not picked her up in the interim. "I want them to conceal my emotions if your revelations surprise me·

Have you never seen me use them when receiving the compliments of Senator Planefield and his friends? A little turn to the right or the left—the least graceful little turn, and I can look as I please, and they will see nothing and only hear my voice, which, I trust, is always sufficiently under control."

She wondered if it was sufficiently under control now. She was not sure, and because she was not sure she made the most reckless speeches she could think of. There was a story she had heard of a diplomatist, who once so entirely bewildered his fellow diplomats that they found it impossible to cope with him—they were invariably outwitted by him: the greatest subtlety, the most wondrous *coup d'état*, he baffled alike; mystery surrounded him; his every act was enshrouded in it; with such diplomatic methods it was madness to combat. When his brilliant and marvellous career was at an end, his secret was discovered: on every occasion he had told the simple, exact truth. As she leaned back in her chair and played with her screen, Bertha thought of this story. She had applied it to herself before this. The one thing which would be incredible to him at this moment—the one

thing it would appear more than incredible that she should tell him, would be the truth—if he realised what that truth was. Any other story, however wild, might have its air or suggestion of plausibility; but that, being what it was, she should have the nerve, the daring, the iron strength of self-control which it would require to make a fearless jest of the simple, terrible truth, it would seem to him the folly of a madman to believe, she knew. To look him in the eye with a smile, and tell him that she feared his glance and dreaded his words, would place the statement without the pale of probability. She had told him things as true before, and he had not once thought of believing them. "It is never difficult to persuade him *not* to believe me," she thought. There was no one of her many moods of which she felt such terror, in her more natural moments, as of the one which held possession of her now; and yet there was none she felt to be so safe, which roused her to such mental exhilaration while its hour lasted, or resulted in such reaction when it had passed. "I am never afraid then," she said to Agnes once. "There is nothing I could not bear. It seems as if I were made of

steel, and had never been soft or timid in my life. Everything is gone but my power over myself, and—yes, it intoxicates me. Until it is over I am not really hurt, I think. There was something I read once about a man who was broken on the wheel, and while it was being done he laughed and shrieked and sang. I think all women are like that sometimes: while they are being broken they laugh and shriek and sing; but afterwards—afterwards—"

So now she spoke the simple truth.

"I shall have you at a disadvantage, you may observe," she said. "I shall see your face, and you will not see mine—unless I wish you to do so. A little turn of my wrist and you have only my voice to rely upon. Do you wish to speak to me before Richard comes in? If so, I am afraid you must waste no time, as his train is due at twelve. You were going to say—"

"I am afraid it is something you will not like to hear," he answered, "though I did not contradict you when you suggested that it was."

"You were outside then," she replied, "and I might not have let you come in."

"No," he said, "you might not."

He looked at the feather screen which she had inclined a trifle.

"Your screen reminded me of your great lady, Bertha," he said, "because I saw her to-night, and—and heard her—and she was speaking of you."

"Of me!" she replied. "That was kind, indeed."

"No," he returned, "it was not. She was neither generous nor lenient—she did not even speak the truth; and yet, as I heard her, I was obliged to confess that, to those who did not know you and only saw you as you were to-night, what she said might not appear so false."

Bertha turned her screen aside and looked at him composedly.

"She was speaking of Senator Planefield," she remarked, "and Judge Ballard, and Commander Barnacles. She reprehended my frivolity and deplored the tendency of the age."

"She was speaking of Senator Planefield," he answered.

She moved the screen a little.

"Has Senator Planefield been neglecting her?" she said. "I hope not."

"Lay your screen aside, Bertha," he com-

manded hotly. "You don't need it. What I have to say will not disturb you as I feared it would—no, I should say as I hoped it would. It is only this: that these people were speaking lightly of you—that they connected your name with Planefield's as—as no honest man is willing that the name of his wife should be connected with that of another man. That was all; and I, who am always interfering with your pleasures, could not bear it, and so have made the blunder of interfering again."

There were many things she had borne, of which she had said nothing to Agnes Sylvestre in telling her story—things she had forced herself to ignore or pass by; but just now some sudden, passionate realisation of them was too much for her, and she answered him in words she felt it was madness to utter even as they leaped to her lips.

"Richard has not been unwilling," she said. "Richard has not resented it!"

"If he had been in my place," he began, feeling ill at ease—"if he understood—"

She dropped her screen upon her lap and looked at him with steady eyes.

"No," she interposed, "that is a mistake. He would not have looked upon the matter

thing in the midst of all—all this, to which you have been true. You have loved your children when it has seemed that nothing else would touch you. I say 'seemed,' because I swear to you I am unmoved in my disbelief in what you persist in holding before me—for what reason you know best. You love your children; you don't lie to me about that—you don't lie to yourself about it. Perhaps it is only nature, as you said once, and not tenderness; I don't know. I don't understand you; but give yourself a few moments to think of them now."

He saw the hand holding the screen tremble; he could not see her face.

"What—must I think of them?" she said.

He looked down at the floor, knitting his brows and dragging at his great moustache.

"I over-estimate the importance of things," he said. "I don't seem to know much about the standards society sets up for itself; but it does not seem a trifle to me that their mother should be spoken of lightly. There was a girl I knew once—long ago——" He stopped and looked up at her with sudden, sad candour. "It is you I am thinking of, Bertha," he said; "you, as I remember you

first when you came home from school. I was thinking of your mother and your dependence upon her, and the tenderness there was between you."

"And you were thinking," she added, "that Janey's mother would not be so good and worthy of trust. That is true."

"I have no answer to make to that, Bertha," he said. "None."

She laid the screen upon her lap once more.

"But it *is* true," she said, "it is *true*. Why do you refuse to believe it? Are you so good that you cannot? Yes, you are! As for me —what did I tell you? I am neither good nor bad, and I want excitement. Nine people out of ten are so, and I am no worse than the rest of the nine. One must be amused. If I were religious, I should have Dorcas societies and missions. As I am not, I have——" She paused one second, no more. "I have Senator Planefield."

She could bear the inaction of sitting still no longer. She got up.

"You have an ideal for everything," she said, "for men, women, and children — especially for women, I think. You are

always telling yourself that they are good and pure and loving and faithful; that they adore their children, and are true to their friends. It is very pretty, but it is not always the fact. You try to believe it is true of me; but it is not. I am not your ideal woman. I have told you so. Have you not found out yet that Bertha Amory is not what you were so sure Bertha Herrick would be?"

"Yes," he answered. "You—you have convinced me of that."

"It was inevitable," she continued. "I was very young then. I knew nothing of the world or of its distractions and temptations. A thousand things have happened to change me. And, after all, what right had you to expect so much of me. I was neither one thing nor the other, even then; I was only ignorant. You could not expect me to be ignorant always."

"Bertha," he demanded, "what are you trying to prove to me?"

"Only a little thing," she answered; "that I need my amusements, and cannot live without them."

He rose from his seat also.

"That you cannot live without Senator Planefield?" he said.

"Go and tell him so," was her reply. "It would please him, and perhaps this evening he would be inclined to place some confidence in the statement."

She turned and walked to the end of the room; then she came back and stood quite still before him.

"I am going to tell you something I would rather keep to myself," she said. "It may save us both trouble if I don't spare myself as my vanity prompts me to do. I said I was no worse than the other nine; but I am—a little. I am not very fond of anything or any one. Not so fond even of—Richard and the children, as I seem. I know that, though they do not. If they were not attractive and amiable, or if they interfered with my pleasures, my affection would not stand many shocks. In a certain way I am emotional enough always to appear better than I am. Things touch me for a moment. I was touched a little just now when you spoke of remembering my being a girl. I was moved when Janey was ill and you were so good to me. I almost persuaded myself that I was good too

—and faithful and affectionate, and yet at the same time I knew it was only a fancy, and I should get over it. It is easy for me to laugh and cry when I choose. There are tears in my eyes now, but — they don't deceive me."

"They look like real tears, Bertha," he said. "They would have deceived me — if you had not given me warning."

"They always *look* real," she answered. "And is not there a sort of merit in my not allowing you to believe in them? Call it a merit, won't you?"

His face became like a mask. For several seconds he did not speak. The habit he had of taking refuge in utter silence was the strongest weapon he could use against her. He did not know its strength—he only knew that it was the signal of his own desperate helplessness—but it left her without defence or resource.

"Won't you?" she said, feeling that she must say something.

He hesitated before replying.

"No," he answered stonily after the pause. "I won't call it a merit. I wish you would leave me—something."

That was very hard.

"It is true," she returned, "that I do not —leave you very much."

The words cost her such an effort that there were breaks between them.

"No," he said, "not much."

There was something almost dogged in his manner. He could not bear a great deal more, and his consciousness of this truth forced him to brace himself to outward hardness.

"I don't ask very much," he said. "I only ask you to spare yourself and your children. I only ask you to keep out of danger. It is yourself I ask you to think of, not me. Treat me as you like, but don't—don't be cruel to yourself. I am afraid it does not do for a woman—even a woman as cool as you are—to trifle with herself and her name. I have heard it said so, and I could not remain silent after hearing what I did to-night."

He turned as if to move away.

"You are going?" she said.

"Yes," he replied. "It is very late, and it would be useless to say any more."

"You have not shaken hands with me," she said when he was half way to the door.

The words forced themselves from her. Her power of endurance failed her at the last moment, as it had done before and would do again.

He came back to her.

"You will never hold out your hand to me when I shall not be ready to take it, Bertha," he said. "You know that."

She did not speak.

"You are chilled," he said. "Your hand is quite cold."

"Yes," she replied. "I shall lie down on the sofa by the fire a little while before going up stairs."

Without saying anything he left her, drew the sofa nearer to the hearth and arranged the cushions.

"I would advise you not to fall asleep," he said when this was done.

"I shall not fall asleep," she answered. She went to the sofa and sat down on it.

"Good-night," she said.

And he answered her "Good-night," and went out of the room.

She sat still a few seconds after he was gone, and then lay down. Her eyes wandered over the room. She saw the ornaments, the

pictures on the wall, the design of the rug, every minute object with a clearness which seemed to magnify its importance and significance. There was a little Cloissoné jar whose pattern she never seemed to have seen before; she was looking at it when at last she spoke:

"It is very hard to live," she said. "I wish it was not—so hard. I wish there was some way of helping oneself, but there is not. One can only go on—and on—and there is always something worse coming."

She put her hand upon her breast. Something rose beneath it which gave her suffocating pain. She staggered to her feet, pressing one hand on the other to crush this pain down. No woman who has suffered such a moment but has done the same thing, and done it in vain. She fell, half kneeling, half sitting, upon the rug, her body against her chair, her arms flung out.

"Why do you struggle with me?" she cried, between her sobs. "Why do you look at me so? You—hurt me! I love you! Oh! let me go—let me go! Don't you know—I can't bear it!"

In the street she heard carriages rolling

homeward from some gay gathering. One of them stopped a few doors away, and the people got out of it laughing and talking. "Don't laugh!" she said, shuddering. "No one—should laugh! I laugh! O God! O God!"

In half an hour Richard came in. He had taken Miss Varien home, and remained to talk with her a short time. As he entered the house Bertha was going up the staircase, her gleaming dress trailing behind her, her feather-trimmed wrap over her arm. She turned and smiled down at him.

"Your charms will desert you if you keep such hours as these," she said. "How did you enjoy yourself, or, rather, how did you enjoy Miss Varien, and how many dazzling remarks did she make?"

"More than I could count," he said, laughing. "Wait a moment for me—I am coming up." And he ran up the steps lightly and joined her, slipping his arm about her waist.

"You looked tired," he said, "but your charms never desert you. Was that the shudder of guilt? Whose peace of mind have you been destroying?"

"Colonel Tredennis's," she answered.

"Then it was not the shudder of guilt," he returned, laughing again. And as she leaned gently against him he bent and kissed her.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### Mrs. Sylvestre.

It was generally conceded that nothing could be more agreeable than Mrs. Sylvestre's position and surroundings. Those of her acquaintance who had known her before her marriage, seeking her out, pronounced her more full of charm than ever; those who saw her for the first time could scarcely express with too much warmth their pleasure in her grace, gentleness, and beauty. Her house was only less admired than herself, and Mrs. Merriam, promptly gathering a coterie of old friends about her, established herself most enviably at once. It became known to the world, through the medium of the social columns of the dailies, that Mrs. Sylvestre was at home on Tuesday afternoons, and that she also received her friends each

Wednesday evening. On these occasions her parlours were always well filled, and with society so agreeable that it was not long before they were counted among the most attractive social features of the week. Professor Herrick himself appeared on several Wednesdays, and it was gradually remarked that Colonel Tredennis presented himself upon the scene more frequently than their own previous knowledge of his habits would have led the observers to expect. On seeing Mrs. Sylvestre in the midst of her guests and admirers, Miss Jessup was reminded of Madame Récamier and the *salons* of Paris, and wrote almost an entire letter on the subject, which was printed by the *Wabash Times*, under the heading of "A Recent Récamier," and described Mrs. Sylvestre's violet eyes, soft voice, and willowy figure, with nothing short of enthusiasm.

Under these honours Mrs. Sylvestre bore herself very calmly. If she had a fault, an impetuous acquaintance once remarked, it was that she was too calm. She found her life even more interesting than she had hoped it would be; there was pleasure in the renewal of old friendships and habits and the

formation of new ones, and in time it became less difficult to hold regrets and memories in check with a steady hand. She neither gave herself to retrospection nor to feverish gaiety; she felt she had outlived her need of the latter and her inclination for the former. Without filling her life with excitement, she enjoyed the recreations of each day as they came, and felt no resulting fatigue. When Professor Herrick came to spend an evening hour with her and sat by the fire gently admiring her as he was led on to talk, and also gently admiring Mrs. Merriam, who was in a bright, shrewd humour, she herself was filled with pleasure in them both. She liked their ripeness of thought and their impartial judgment of the life whose prejudices they had outlived. And as genuinely as she liked this she enjoyed Colonel Tredennis, who now and then came too. In the first place, he came because he was asked, but afterward because, at the end of his first visit, he left the house with a sense of being in some vague way the better for it. Agnes's manner towards him had been very kind. She had shown an interest in himself and his pursuits which had somehow

beguiled him out of his usual reticence and brought the best of his gifts to the surface, though nothing could have been more unstrained and quiet than the tone of their conversation. He was at no disadvantage when they talked together; he could keep pace with her and understand her gentle thoughts; she did not bewilder him or place him on the defensive. Once, as he looked at her sweet, reposeful face, he remembered what Bertha had said of his ideal woman and the thought rose in his mind that this was she—fair, feminine, full of all tender sympathy and kindly thought; not ignorant of the world nor bitter against it, only bearing no stain of it upon her. "All women should be so," he thought, sadly. And Agnes saw the shadow fall upon his face, and wondered what he was thinking of.

She began to speak to him of Bertha soon afterwards, and, perhaps, if the whole truth were told, it was while she so spoke that he felt her grace and sweetness most movingly. The figure her words brought before him was the innocent one he loved, the one he only saw in memory and dreams, and whose eyes followed him with an appeal which was sad

truth itself. At first Agnes spoke of the time when they had been girls together, making their *entrée* into society, with others as young and untried as themselves—Bertha the happiest and brightest of them all.

"She was always a success," she said. "She had that quality. One doesn't know how to analyse it. People remembered her and were attracted, and she never made them angry or envious. Men who had been in love with her remained her friends. It was because she was so true to them. She was always a true friend."

She remembered so many incidents of those early days, and in her relation of them Bertha appeared again and again the same graceful, touching young presence, always generous and impetuous, ready of wit, bright of spirit, and tender of heart.

"We all loved her," said Agnes. "She was worth loving; and she is not changed."

"Not changed," said Tredennis, involuntarily.

"Did you think her so?" she asked gently.

"Sometimes," he answered, looking down. "I am not sure that I know her very well."

But he knew that he took comfort with him when he went away, and that he was full of heartfelt gratitude to the woman who had defended him against himself. When he sat among his books that night his mind was calmer than it had been for many a day, and he felt his loneliness less. What wonder that he went to the house again and again, and oftener to spend a quiet hour than when others were there. When his burdens weighed most heavily upon him, and his skies looked darkest, Agnes Sylvestre rarely failed to give him help. When he noted her thoughtfulness for others, he did not know what method there was in her thoughtfulness for himself, and with what skilful tact and delicate care she chose the words in which she spoke to him of Bertha; he only felt that, after she had talked to him, the shadow which was his companion was less a shadow, and more a fair truth to be believed in and to draw faith and courage from.

The Professor who met him once or twice during his informal calls, spoke of the fact to Arbuthnot with evident pleasure.

"He was at his best," he said, "and I have noticed that it is always so when he is

there. The truth is, it would be impossible to resist the influence of that beautiful young woman."

His acquaintance with Mr. Arbuthnot had taken upon itself something of the character of an intimacy. They saw each other almost daily. The Professor had indeed made many discoveries concerning the younger man, but none which caused him to like him less. He had got over his first inclination towards surprise at finding they had many things in common, having early composed himself to meet with calmness any source of momentary wonder which might present itself, deciding at length that he himself was either younger or his new acquaintance older than he had imagined, without making the matter an affair of years. The two fell into a comfortable habit of discussing the problems of the day, and, though their methods were entirely different, and Arbuthnot was, at the outset, much given to a light treatment of argument, they always understood each other in the end, and were drawn a trifle nearer by the debate. It was actually discovered that Laurence had gone so far as to initiate the unwary Professor into the evil practice of smoking, having

gradually seduced him by the insidious temptings of the most delicate cigars. The discussions, it was observed, were always more enjoyable when the Professor, having his easy-chair placed in exactly the right position with regard to light and fire, found himself with his cigar in hand, carefully smoking it and making the most of its aroma. His tranquil enjoyment of and respect for the rite were agreeable things to see.

"It soothes me," he would say to Arbuthnot. "It even inspires and elevates me. I feel as if I had discovered a new sense. I am really quite grateful."

It was Arbuthnot who generally arranged his easy-chair, showing a remarkable instinct in the matter of knowing exactly what was necessary to comfort. Among his discoveries concerning him the Professor counted this one that he had in such things the silent quickness of perception and deft-handedness of a woman, and perhaps it had at first surprised him more than all else.

It may have been for some private reason of his own that the Professor occasionally gave to the conversation a lighter tone, even giving a friendly and discursive attention

to social topics, and showing an interest in the doings of pleasure lovers and the butterflies of fashion. At such times Arbuthnot noticed that, beginning with a reception at the British Embassy, they not unfrequently ended with Bertha; or, opening with the last dinner at the White House, closed with Richard and the weekly "evenings" adorned by the presence of Senator Planefield and his colleague. So it was perfectly natural that they should not neglect Mrs. Sylvestre, to whom the Professor had taken a great fancy, and whose progress he watched with much interest. He frequently spoke of her to Arbuthnot, dwelling upon the charm which made her what she was, and analysing it and its influence upon others. It appeared to have specially impressed itself upon him on the occasion of his seeing Tredennis, and, having said that it would be impossible to resist this "beautiful young woman"—as he had fallen into the unconscious habit of calling her—he went on to discourse further.

"She is too tranquil to make any apparent effort," he said. "And yet the coldest and most reserved person must be warmed and moved by her. You have seen that—though

you are neither the most reserved nor the coldest."

Arbuthnot was smoking the most perfectly flavoured of cigars, and giving a good deal of delicate attention to it. At this he took it from his mouth, looked at the end, and removed the ash with a touch of his finger, in doing which he naturally kept his eyes upon the cigar and not upon the Professor.

"Yes," he said, "I have recognised it, of course."

"You see her rather often, I think?" said the Professor.

"I am happy to be permitted that privilege," was the answer; "though I am aware I am indebted for it far more to Mrs. Amory than to my own fascinations—numberless and powerful though they may be."

"It is a privilege," said the Professor, "but it is more of one to Philip than to you—even more of one than he knows. He needs what such a woman might give him."

"Does he?" said Arbuthnot. "Might I ask what that is?"

And he was angry with himself because he did not say it with more ease and less of a sense of unreasonable irritation. The

Professor seemed to forget his cigar, he held it in the hand which rested on his chair-arm, and neglected it while he gave himself up to thought.

"He has changed very much during the past year," he said. "In the last few months I have noticed it specially. I miss something from his manner, and he looks fagged and worn. It has struck me that he rather needs an interest, and feels his loneliness without being conscious that he does so. After all, it is only natural. A man who leads an isolated life inevitably reaches a period when his isolation wearies him, and he broods over it a little."

"And you think," said Arbuthnot, "that Mrs. Sylvestre might supply the interest?"

"Don't you think so yourself?" suggested the Professor, mildly.

"Oh," said Laurence, "*I* think the man would be hard to please who did not find she could supply him with anything and everything."

And he laughed and made a few rings of smoke, watching them float upward towards the ceiling.

"He would have a great deal to bring her,"

said the Professor, speaking for the moment rather as if to himself than to any audience. "And she would have a great deal in return for what she could bestow. He has always been what he is to-day, and only such a man is worthy of her. No man who had trifled with himself and his past could offer what is due to her."

"That is true," said Laurence.

He made more rings of smoke and blew them away.

"As for Tredennis," he said with a deliberateness he felt necessary to his outward composure, "his advantage is that he does not exactly belong to the nineteenth century. He has no place in parlours; when he enters one without the least pretension or consciousness of himself, he towers over the rest of us with a gigantic modesty it is useless to endeavour to bear up against. He ought to wear a red cross, and carry a battle-axe, and go on a crusade, or right the wrongs of the weak by unhorsing the oppressor in single combat. He might found a Round Table. His crush hat should be a helmet, and he should appear in armour."

The Professor smiled.

"That is a very nice figure," he said, "though you don't treat it respectfully. It pleases my fancy."

Arbuthnot laughed again, not the gayest laugh possible.

"It is he who is a nice figure," he returned. "And though he little suspects it, he is the one most admired of women. He could win anything he wanted and would deserve all he won. Oh, I'm respectful enough. I'm obliged to be. There's the rub!"

"Is it a rub?" asked the Professor, a little disturbed by an illogical fancy which at the moment presented itself without a shadow of warning.

"*You* don't want the kind of thing he might care for."

This time Laurence's laugh had recovered its usual delightful tone. He got up and went to the mantel for a match to light a new cigar.

"I!" he said. "I want nothing but the assurance that I shall be permitted to retain my position in the Treasury until I don't need it. It is a modest ambition, isn't it? and yet I am afraid it will be thwarted. And

then—in the next administration, perhaps—I shall be seedy and out at elbows, and Mrs. Amory won't like to invite me to her Thursday evenings, because she will know it will make me uncomfortable, and then—then I shall disappear."

"Something has disturbed you," commented the Professor, rather seriously. "You are talking nonsense."

And as he said it, the thought occurred to him that he had heard more of that kind of nonsense than usual of late, and that the fact was likely to be of some significance. "It is the old story," he thought, "and it is beginning to wear upon him until he does not control himself quite so completely as he did at first. That is natural too. Perhaps Bertha herself has been a little cruel to him in her woman's way. She has not been bearing it so well either."

"My dear Professor," said Laurence, "everything is relative, and what you call nonsense I regard as my most successful conversational efforts. *I* could not wield Excalibur. Don't expect it of me, I beg you."

If he had made an effort to evade any further discussion of Mrs. Sylvestre and the

possibilities of her future, he had not failed in it. They talked of her no more—in fact, they talked very little at all. A shade had fallen upon the Professor's face and did not pass away. He lighted his cigar again, but scarcely seemed to enjoy finishing it. If Arbuthnot had been in as alert a mental condition as usual, his attention would have been attracted by the anxious thoughtfulness of his old friend's manner; but he himself was pre-occupied and rather glad of the opportunity to be silent. When the cigars were finished and he was on the point of taking his departure, the Professor seemed to rouse himself as if from a reverie.

"That modest ambition of yours——" he began slowly.

"Thank you for thinking of it," said Arbuthnot, as he paused.

"It interests me," replied the Professor, "you are continually finding something to interest me. There is no reason why it should be thwarted, you know."

"I wish I did," returned Laurence. "But I don't, you see. They are shaky pieces of architecture, those Government buildings. The foundation-stones are changed too often

to insure a sense of security to the occupants. No; my trouble is that I don't know."

"You have a great many friends," said the Professor.

"I have a sufficient number of invitations to make myself generally useful," said Laurence, "and of course they imply an appreciation of my social gifts which gratifies me; but a great deal depends on a man's wardrobe. I might as well be without talents as minus a dress-coat. It interests me sometimes to recognise a brother in the 'song and dance artist' who is open to engagements. I, my dear Professor, am the 'song and dance artist.' When I am agile and in good voice, I am recalled; but they would not want me if I were hoarse and out of spirits, and had no spangles."

"You might get something better than you have," said the Professor, reflectively. "You ought to get something better."

"To whom shall I apply?" said Laurence. "Do you think the President would receive me to-morrow? Perhaps he has already mentioned his anxiety to see me." Then, his manner changing, he added, with some hurry: "You are very good, but I think it

is no use. The mistake was in letting myself drift as I did. It would not have happened if—if I hadn't been a fool. It was my own fault. Thank you! Don't think of me. It wouldn't pay me to do it myself, and you may be sure it would not pay you."

And he shook the Professor's hand and left him.

He was not in the best of humours when he reached the street, and was obliged to acknowledge that of late the experience had not been as rare a one as discretion should have made it. His equable enjoyment of his irresponsible existence had not held its own entirely this winter. It had been disturbed by irrational moods and touches of irritability. He had broken, in spite of himself, the strict rules he had laid down against introspection and retrospection; he had found himself deviating in the direction of shadowy regrets and discontents. And this in the face of the fact that no previous season had presented to him greater opportunities for enjoyment than this one. Certainly he counted as the most enviable of his privileges those bestowed upon him by the inmates of the new establishment in Lafayette Place. His intimacy with the

Amorys had placed him upon a more familiar footing than he could have hoped to attain under ordinary circumstances, and, this much gained, his social gifts and appreciation of the favour shown him, did the rest.

"Your Mr. Arbuthnot," remarked Mrs. Merriam, after having conversed with him once or twice, "or, I suppose, I ought rather to say little Mrs. Amory's Mr. Arbuthnot, is a wonderfully suitable person."

"Suitable?" repeated Agnes. "For what?"

"For anything—for everything. He would never be out of place, and his civility is absolute genius."

Mrs. Sylvestre's smile was for her relative's originality of statement, and apparently bore not the slightest reference to Mr. Arbuthnot himself.

"People are never entirely impersonal," Mrs. Merriam went on. "But an appearance of being so may be cultivated, as this gentleman has cultivated his, until it is almost perfection. He never projects himself into the future. When he picks up your handkerchief, he does not appear to be thinking how you will estimate his civility; he simply restores

you an article you would miss. He does nothing with an air, and he never forgets things. Perhaps the best part of his secret is that he never forgets himself."

"I am afraid he must find that rather tiresome," Agnes remarked.

"My dear," said Mrs. Merriam, "no one could forget herself less often than you do. That is the secret of your repose of manner. Privately you are always on guard, and your unconsciousness of the fact arises from the innocence of youth. You are younger than you think."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Sylvestre, rising and crossing the room to move a yellow vase on the top of a cabinet, "don't make me begin life over again."

"You have reached the second stage of existence," said the older woman, her bright eyes sparkling. "There are three: the first when one believes everything is white; the second when one is sure everything is black; the third when one knows that the majority of things are simply grey."

"If I were called upon to find a colour for your favourite," said Agnes, bestowing a soft, abstracted smile on the yellow vase, "I

think I should choose grey. He is certainly neutral."

"He is a very good colour," replied Mrs. Merriam; "the best of colours. He matches everything—one's tempers, one's moods, one's circumstances. He is a very excellent colour, indeed."

"Yes?" said Agnes, quietly.

And she carried her vase to another part of the room, and set it on a little ebony stand.

It had become an understood thing, indeed, that her relative found Laurence Arbuthnot entertaining, and was disposed to be very gracious towards him. On his part, he found her the cleverest and most piquant of elderly personages. When he entered the room where she sat it was her habit to make a place for him at her own side, and to enjoy a little agreeable gossip with him before letting him go. After they had had a few such conversations together, Arbuthnot began to discover that his replies to her references to himself and his past had not been so entirely marked by reticence as he had imagined when he had made them. His friend had a talent for putting the most adroit leading

questions, which did not betray their significance upon the surface; and once or twice, after answering such a one, he had seen a look in her sparkling old eyes which led him to ponder over his own words as well as hers. Still she was always astute and vivacious, and endowed him for the time being with a delightful sense of being at his best, for which he was experienced enough to be grateful. He had also sufficient experience to render him alive to the fact that he preferred to be at his best when it was his good fortune to adorn this particular drawing-room with his presence. He knew before long that when he had made a speech upon which he privately prided himself, after the manner of weak humanity, he found it agreeable to be flattered by the consciousness that Mrs. Sylvestre's passion-flower coloured eyes were resting upon him with that delicious suggestion of reflection. He was not rendered happier by the knowledge of this susceptibility, but he was obliged to admit its existence in himself. Few men of his years were as little prone to such natural weaknesses, and he had not attained his somewhat abnormal state of composure without paying its price. And yet

he had begun life with a large enough capital of fancy and emotion. Perhaps the capital had been too large.

"If one has less, one is apt to be more economical," Bertha had heard him remark, "and at least retain a small annuity to exist upon in one's maturer years. I did not retain such an annuity."

Certainly there was one period of his life upon which he never looked back without a shudder; and this being the case, he had taught himself, as time passed, not to look back upon it at all. He had also taught himself not to look forward, finding the one almost as bad as the other. As Bertha had said, he was not fond of affairs, and even his enemies were obliged to admit that he was ordinarily too discreet or too cold to engage in the most trivial of such agreeable entanglements.

"If I pick up a red-hot coal," he said, "I shall burn my fingers, even if I throw it away quickly. Why should a man expose himself to the chance of being obliged to bear a blister about with him for a day or so? If I may be permitted, I prefer to stand before the fire and enjoy an agreeable

warmth without personal interference with the blaze."

Nothing could have been farther from his intentions than interference with the blaze, where Mrs. Sylvestre was concerned; though he had congratulated himself upon the glow her grace and beauty diffused, certainly no folly could have been nearer akin to madness than such folly, if he had been sufficiently unsophisticated to indulge in it. And he was not unsophisticated—few men were less so. His perfect and just appreciation of his position bounded him on every side, and it would have been impossible for him to lose sight of it. He had never blamed any one but himself for the fact that he had accomplished nothing particular in life, and had no prospect of accomplishing anything. It had been his own fault, he had always said; if he had been a better and stronger fellow, he would not have been beaten down by one blow, however sharp and heavy. He had given up because he chose to give up and let himself drift. His life since then had been agreeable enough; he had had his moments of action and reaction, he had laughed one day and felt a little glum the

next, and had let one mood pay for the next, and trained himself to expect nothing better. He had not had any inclination for marriage, and had indeed frequently imagined that he had a strong disinclination for it; his position in the Amory household had given him an abiding-place which was like having a home without bearing the responsibility of such an incumbrance.

"I regard myself," Bertha sometimes said to him, "as having been a positive boon to you. If I had not been so good to you, there would have been moments when you would have almost wished you were married. And if you had had such moments, the day of your security would have been at an end."

"Perfectly true," he invariably responded, "and I am grateful accordingly."

He began to think of this refuge of his, after he had walked a few minutes. He became conscious that, the longer he was alone with himself, the less agreeable he found the situation. There was a sentence of the Professor's which repeated itself again and again, and made him feel restive; somehow, he could not rid himself of the memory of it.

"No man who had trifled with himself

and his past could offer what is due to her." It was a simple enough truth, and he found nothing in it to complain of; but it was not an exhilarating thing to dwell upon and be haunted by.

He stopped suddenly in the street and threw his cigar away. A half laugh broke from him.

"I am resenting it," he said. "It is making me as uncomfortable as if I were a human being, instead of a mechanical invention in the employ of the Government. My works are getting out of order. I will go and see Mrs. Amory; she will give me something to think of. She always does."

A few minutes later he entered the familiar parlour. The first object which met his eye was the figure of Bertha, and, as he had anticipated would be the case, she gave him something to think of. But it was not exactly the kind of thing he had hoped for, though it was something, it is true, which he had found himself confronted with once or twice before. It was something in herself, which on his first sight of her presented itself to him so forcibly that it gave him something very near a shock.

He had evidently broken in upon some moment of absorbed thought. She was standing near the mantel, her hands clasped behind her head, her eyes seeming fixed on space. The strangeness of her attitude struck him first, and then the unusualness of her dress, whose straight, long lines of unadorned black revealed, as he had never seen it revealed before, the change which had taken place in her.

She dropped her hands when she saw him, but did not move towards him.

"Did you meet Richard?" she said.

"No," he replied. "Did he want to see me?"

"He said something of the kind, though I am not quite sure what it was."

Their eyes rested on each other as he approached her. In the questioning of hers there was a touch of defiance, but he knew its meaning too well to be daunted by it.

"I would not advise you to wear that dress again," he said.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Go to the mirror and look at yourself," he said.

She turned, walked across the room with a

slow, careless step, as if the effort was scarcely worth while. There was an antique mirror on the wall, and she stopped before it and looked herself over.

"It isn't wise, is it?" she said. "It makes me look like a ghost. No it doesn't *make* me look like one; it simply shows me as I am. It couldn't be said of me just now that I am at my best, could it?"

Then she turned round.

"I don't seem to care!" she said. "*Don't* I care? That would be a bad sign in *me*, wouldn't it?"

"I should consider it one," he answered. "It is only in novels that people can afford not to care. You cannot afford it. Don't wear a dress again which calls attention to the fact that you are so ill and worn as to seem only a shadow of yourself. It *isn't* wise."

"Why should one object to being ill?" she said. "It is not such a bad idea to be something of an invalid, after all; it insures one a great many privileges. It is not demanded of invalids that they shall always be brilliant. They are permitted to be pale, and silent and heavy-eyed, and lapses are not treasured up

against them." She paused an instant. "When one is ill," she said, "nothing one does or leaves undone is of any special significance. It is like having a holiday."

"Do you want to take such a holiday?" he asked. "Do you need it?"

She stood quite still a moment, and he knew she did it because she wished to steady her voice.

"Sometimes," she said at last, "I think I do."

Since he had first known her there had been many times when she had touched him without being in the least conscious that she did so. He had often found her laughter as pathetic as other people's tears, even while he had joined in it himself. Perhaps there was something in his own mood which made her seem in those few words more touching than she had ever been before.

"Suppose you begin to take it now," he said, "while I am with you."

She paused a few seconds again before answering. Then she looked up.

"When people ask you how I am," she said, "you might tell them that I am not very well, that I have not been well for

some time, and that I am not getting better."

"Are you getting—worse?" he asked.

Her reply—if reply it was—was a singular one. She pushed the sleeve of her black dress a little away from her wrist, and stood looking down at it without speaking. There were no bangles on the wrist this morning, and without these adornments its slenderness seemed startling. The small, delicate bones marked themselves, and every blue vein was traceable.

Neither of them spoke, and in a moment she drew the sleeve down again, and went back to her place by the fire. To tell the truth, Arbuthnot could not have spoken at first. It was she who at length broke the silence, turning to look at him as he sat in the seat he had taken, his head supported by his hand.

"Will you tell me," she said, "what has hurt *you*?"

"Why should you ask that?" he said.

"I should be very blind and careless of you if I had not seen that something had happened to you," she answered. "You are always caring for me, and—understanding

me. It is only natural that I should have learned to understand you a little. This has not been a good winter for you. What is it, Larry?"

"I wish it was something interesting," he answered, "but it is not. It is the old story. I am out of humour. I'm dissatisfied. I have been guilty of the folly of not enjoying myself on one or two occasions, and the consciousness of it irritates me."

"It is always indiscreet not to enjoy oneself," she said.

And then there was silence for a moment, while she looked at him again.

Suddenly she broke into a laugh—a laugh almost hard in its tone. He glanced up to see what it meant.

"Do you want to know what makes me laugh?" she said. "I am thinking how like all this is to an old-fashioned tragedy, where all the *dramatis personæ* are disposed of in the last act. We go over, one by one, don't we? Soon there will be no one left to tell the tale. Even Colonel Tredennis and Richard show signs of their approaching doom. And you—some one has shown you your dagger, I think, and you know you cannot escape it."

"I am the ghost," he answered; "the ghost who was disposed of before the tragedy began, and whose business it is to haunt the earth, and remind the rest of you that once I had blood in my veins too."

He broke off suddenly and left his seat. The expression of his face had altogether changed.

"We always talk in this strain," he exclaimed. "We are always jeering! Is there anything on earth—any suffering or human feeling, we could treat seriously? If there is, for God's sake let us speak of it just for one hour."

She fixed her eyes on him, and there was a sad little smile in their depths.

"Yes, you have seen your dagger," she said. "You have seen it. Poor Larry! Poor Larry!"

She turned away and sat down, clasping her hands on her knee, and he saw that suddenly her lashes were wet, and thought that it was very like her that, though she had had no tears for herself, she had them for him.

"Don't be afraid that I will ask you any questions," she said. "I won't. You never

asked me any. Perhaps words would not do you any good."

"Nothing would do me any good just now," he answered. "Let it go at that. It mayn't be as bad as it seems just for the moment—such things seldom are. If it gets really worse, I suppose I shall find myself coming to you some day to make my plaint; but it's very good in you to look at me like that. And I was a fool to fancy I wanted to be serious. I don't, on the whole."

"No, you were not a fool," she said. "There is no reason why *you* should not be what you want. Laurence," with something like sudden determination in her tone, "there is something I want to say to you."

"What is it?" he asked.

"I have got into a bad habit lately," she said, "a bad habit of thinking. When I lie awake at night——"

"Do you lie awake at night?" he interrupted.

She turned her face a little away, as if she did not wish to meet his inquiring gaze.

"Yes," she answered, after a pause. "I suppose it is because of this—habit. I can't help it—but it doesn't matter."

"Oh," he exclaimed, "it does matter! You can't stand it."

"Is there anything people 'cannot stand?'" she said. "If there is, I should like to try it."

"You may well look as you do," he said.

"Yes, I may well," she answered. "And it is the result of the evil practice of thinking. When once you begin, it is not easy to stop. And I think you have begun."

"I shall endeavour to get over it," he replied.

"No," she said, "don't!"

She rose from her seat and stood up before him trembling, and with two large tears fallen upon her cheeks.

"Larry," she said, "that is what I wanted to say—that is what I have been thinking of. I shall not say it well, because we have laughed at each other so long that it is not easy to speak of anything seriously; but I must try. See! I am tired of laughing. I have come to the time when there seems to be nothing left but tears—and there is no help; but you are different, and if you are tired too, and if there is anything you want, even if you could not be sure of having it, it would

be better to be trying to earn it—and to be worthy of it."

He rested his forehead on his hands, and kept his eyes fixed on the carpet.

"That is a very exalted way of looking at things," he said, in a low voice. "I am afraid I am not equal to it."

"In the long nights, when I have lain awake and thought so," she went on, "I have seemed to find out that—there were things worth altering all one's life for. I did not want to believe in them at first, but now it is different with me. I could not say so to any one but you—and perhaps not to you to-morrow or the day after—and you will hear me laugh and jeer many a time again. That is my fate—but it need not be yours. Your life is your own. If mine were my own—oh, if mine were my own!" She checked the passionate exclamation with an effort. "When one's life belongs to oneself," she added, "one can do almost anything with it!"

"I have not found it so!" he replied.

"You have never tried," she said. "One does not think of these things until the day comes when there is a reason—a reason for

everything—for pain and gladness, for hope and despair, for the longing to be better and the struggle against being worse. Oh! how can one give up when there is such a reason, and one's life is in one's own hands. I am saying it very badly, Larry, I know that. Agnes Sylvestre could say it better, though she could not mean it more."

"She would not take the trouble to say it at all," he said.

Bertha drew back a pace with an involuntary movement. The repressed ring of bitterness in the words had said a great deal.

"Is it——?" she exclaimed involuntarily—as she had moved—and then stopped. "I said I would not ask questions," she added, and clasped her hands behind her back, standing quite still in an attitude curiously expressive of agitation and suspense.

"What!" he said, "have I told you? I was afraid I should. Yes, it is Mrs. Sylvestre who has disturbed me—it is Mrs. Sylvestre who has disturbed the calm of ages."

She was silent a second, and when she spoke her eyes looked very large and bright.

"I suppose," she said slowly, "that it is

very womanish in me—that I should almost wish it had been some one else."

"Why?" he asked.

"You *all* have been moved by Mrs. Sylvestre," she replied, more slowly than before—"*all* of you."

"How many of us are there?" he inquired.

"Colonel Tredennis has been moved too," she said. "Not long before you came in, he paid me a brief visit. He does not come often now, and his visits are usually for Janey, and not for me. I displeased him the night he went with me to the reception of the Secretary of State and he has not been able to resign himself to seeing me often; but this evening he came in, and we talked of Mrs. Sylvestre. He had been calling upon her, and her perfections were fresh in his memory. He finds her beautiful and generous and sincere; she is not frivolous or capricious. I think that was what I gathered from the few remarks he made. I asked him questions—you see, I wanted to know. And she has this advantage—she has all the virtues which the rest of us have not."

"You are very hard on Tredennis sometimes," he said, answering in this vague way

the look on her face which he knew needed answer.

"Sometimes," she said—"sometimes he is hard on me."

"He has not been easy on *me* to-day," he returned.

"Poor Larry!" she said again. "Poor Larry!"

He smiled a little.

"You see what chance I should be likely to have against such a rival," he said. "I wonder if it ought to be a consolation to me to reflect that my position is such that it cannot be affected by rivals. If I had the field to myself, I should stand exactly where I do at this moment. It saves me from the risk of suffering, don't you see? I know my place too well to allow myself to reach that point. I am uncomfortable only because circumstances have placed it before me in a strong light, and I don't like to look at it."

"What is your place?" she asked.

"It is in the Treasury," he replied. "The salary is not large. I am slightly in debt—to my tailor and hosier, who are, however, patient, because they think I am to be relied on through this administration."

"I wish I knew what to say to you!" she exclaimed. "I wish I knew!"

"I wish you did," he answered. "You have said all you could. I wish I believed what you say. It would be more dignified than to be simply out of humour with oneself, and resentful."

"Larry," she said gently. "I believe you are something more."

"No! no! Nothing more!" he exclaimed. "Nothing more, for heaven's sake!" And he made a quick gesture, as if he was intolerant of the thought, and would like to move it away. So they said no more on this subject, and began soon after to talk about Richard.

"What did you mean," Arbuthnot asked, "by saying that Richard showed signs of his approaching doom? Isn't he in good spirits?"

"It seems incredible," she answered, "that Richard should not be in good spirits, but it has actually seemed to me lately that he was not. The Westoria lands appear to have worried him."

"The Westoria lands," he repeated, slowly.

"He has interested himself in them too much," she said. "Things don't go as easily

as he imagined they would, and it annoys him. To-day—— "

"What happened to-day?" Laurence asked, as she stopped.

"It was not very much," she said; "but it was unlike him. He was a little angry."

"With whom?"

"With me, I think. Lately I have thought I would like to go abroad, and I have spoken of it to him once or twice, and he has rather put it off; and to-day I wanted to speak of it again, and it seemed the wrong time, somehow, and he was a trifle irritable about it. He has not always been quite himself this winter, but he has never been irritable with me. That isn't like him, you know."

"No, it isn't like him," was Laurence's comment.

Afterwards, when he was going away, he asked her a question:

"Do you wish very much to go abroad?" he said.

"Yes," she answered.

"You think the change would do you good?"

"Change often does one good," she replied. "I should like to try it."

"I should like to try it myself," he said. "Go if you can, though no one will miss you more than I shall."

And, having said it, he took his departure.

## CHAPTER IX.

### PHILIP'S FORESIGHT.

BUT Bertha did not go abroad, and the season reached its height and its wane, and though Miss Jessup began to refer occasionally to the much-to-be-regretted delicacy of the charming Mrs. Amory's health, there seemed but little alteration in her mode of life.

"I will confide to you," she said to Colonel Tredennis, "that I have set up this effective little air of extreme delicacy as I might set up a carriage—if I needed one. It is one of my luxuries. Do you remember Lord Farintosh's tooth, which always ached when he was invited out to dinner and did not want to go —the tooth which Ethel Newcome said nothing would induce him to part with? My indisposition is like that. I refuse to become convalescent. Don't prescribe for me, I beg of you."

It was true, as she had said, that the Colonel presented himself at the house less often than had been his wont, and that his visits were more frequently for Janey than for herself. "You will never hold out your hand to me when I shall not be ready to take it," he had said; but she did not hold out her hand, and there was nothing that he could do, and if he went to her he must find himself confronted with things he could not bear to see, and so he told himself that, until he was needed, it was best that he should stay away, or go only now and then.

But he always knew what she was doing. The morning papers told him that she was involved in the old unceasing round of excitement—announcing that she was among the afternoon callers; that she received at home; that she dined, lunched, danced, appeared at charitable entertainments, and was seen at the theatre. It became his habit to turn unconsciously to the society column before he read anything else, though he certainly found himself none the happier for its perusal.

But, though he saw Bertha less frequently, he did not neglect Richard. At this time he

managed to see him rather often, and took some pains to renew the bloom of their first acquaintance, which had, perhaps, shown itself a little on the wane, as Richard's friendships usually did in course of time. And perhaps, this waning having set in, Richard was not at first invariably so enthusiastically glad to see the large military figure present itself in his office. He had reasons of his own for not always feeling entirely at ease before his whilom favourite. As he had remarked to Planefield, Philip Tredennis was not a malleable fellow. He had unflinching habits of truth and remorseless ideas of what a man's integrity should be, and would not be likely to look with lenient or half-seeing eyes upon any palterings with falsehood and dishonour, however coloured and disguised. And he did not always appear at the most convenient moment; there were occasions, indeed, when his unexpected entrance had put an end to business conferences of a very interesting and slightly exciting nature. These conferences had, it is true, some connection with the matter of the Westoria lands, and the Colonel had lately developed an interest in the project in question which he had not

shown at the outset. He had even begun to ask questions about it, and had shown a desire to inform himself as to the methods most likely to be employed in manipulating the great scheme. He amassed, in one way and another, a large capital of information concerning subsidies and land grants, and exhibited remarkable intelligence in his mental investment of it. Indeed, there were times when he awakened in Richard a rather uneasy sense of admiration by the clearness of his insight and the practical readiness of his views.

"He has always been given to digging into things," Amory said to Planefield, after one of their interviews. "That is his habit of mind, and he has a steady business capacity you don't expect to find."

"What is he digging into this thing for?" Planefield asked. "He will be digging up something, one of these days, that we are not particularly anxious to have dug up. I am not overfond of the fellow myself. I never was."

Richard laughed a trifle uneasily.

"Oh, he's well enough," he said; "though I'll admit he has been a little in the way once or twice."

It is quite possible that the Colonel himself had not been entirely unaware of this latter fact, though he had exhibited no signs of his knowledge, either in his countenance or bearing; indeed, it would be difficult, for one so easily swayed by every passing interest as Richard Amory was, to have long resisted his manly courtesy and good nature. Men always found him an agreeable companion, and he made the most of his powers, on the occasions which threw him, or in which he threw himself, in Amory's way. Even Planefield admitted reluctantly, once or twice, that the fellow had plenty in him. It was not long before Richard succumbed to his personal influence with pleasurable indolence. It would have cost him too much effort to combat against it; and, besides this, it was rather agreeable to count among one's friends and supporters a man strong enough to depend on and desirable enough to be proud of. There had been times during the last few months when there would have been a sense of relief in the feeling that there was within reach a stronger nature than his own—one on whose strength he knew he could rely. As their intimacy appeared to establish itself, if he did not openly confide

in Tredennis, he more than once approached the borders of a confidence in his moments of depression. That he had such moments had become plain. He did not even look so bright as he had looked; something of his care-free, joyous air had deserted him, and now and then there were to be seen faint lines on his forehead.

"There is a great deal of responsibility to be borne in a matter like this," he said to Tredennis, "and it wears on a man." To which he added, a few seconds later, with a delightfully unconscious mixture of petulance and protest: "Confound it! why can't things as well turn out right as wrong?"

"Have things been turning out wrong?" the Colonel ventured.

Richard put his elbows on the table before him, and rested his forehead on his hands a second.

"Well, yes," he admitted. "Several things, and just at the wrong time, too. There seems a kind of fate in it—as if, when one thing began, the rest must follow."

The Colonel began to bite one end of his long moustache reflectively as he looked at the young man's knitted brow.

"There is one thing you must understand at the outset," he said at length. "When I can be made useful—supposing such a thing were possible—I am here."

Richard glanced up at him quickly. He looked a little haggard for the moment.

"What a steady, reliable fellow you are!" he said. "Yes, I should be sure of you if—if the worst came to the worst."

The Colonel bit the ends of his moustache all the way home, and more than one passer-by on the avenue was aroused to wonder what the subject of his reflections might be, he strode along with so absorbed an air and frowned so fiercely.

"I should like to know what the worst is," he was saying to himself. "I should like to know what that means."

It was perhaps his desire to know what it meant which lead him to cultivate Richard more faithfully still, to join him on the street, to make agreeable bachelor dinners for him, to carry him off to the theatres, and, in a quiet way, to learn something of what he was doing each day. It was, in fact, a delicate diplomatic position the Colonel occupied in these days, and it cannot be said that he

greatly enjoyed it or liked himself in it. He was too honest by nature to find pleasure in diplomacy, and what he did for another he would never have done for himself. For the sake of the woman who rewarded his generosity and care with frivolous coldness and slight, he had undertaken a task whose weight lay heavily upon him. Since his first suspicions of her danger had been aroused, he had been upon the alert continually, and had seen many things to which the more indifferent or less practical were blind. As Richard had casually remarked, he was possessed of a strong business sense and faculty of which he was not usually suspected, and he had seen signs in the air which he felt boded no good for Richard Amory or those who relied on his discretion in business affairs. That the Professor had innocently relied upon it when he gave his daughter into his hands, he had finally learned; that Bertha never gave other than a transient thought—more than half a jest—to money matters, he knew. Her good fortune it had been to be trammelled neither by the weight of money nor the want of it—a truly enviable condition which had, not unnaturally, engendered in her a confidence

at once unquestioning and somewhat perilous. Tredennis had recalled more than once of late a little scene he had taken part in on the occasion of her signing a legal document Richard had brought to her.

"Shall I sign it here?" she had said, with exaggerated seriousness, "or shall I sign it there? What would happen to me if I wrote on the wrong line? Could not Laurence sign it for me in his Government hand, and give it an air of distinction? Suppose my hand trembled and I made a blot? I am not obliged to read it, am I?"

"I think I should insist that she read it," the Colonel had said to Richard, with some abruptness.

Bertha had looked up and smiled.

"*Shall* you insist that I read it?" she said. "I know what it says. It says 'whereas,' and 'moreover' and 'in accordance' with 'said agreement' and 'in consideration of.' Those are the prevailing sentiments, and I am either the 'party of the first part' or the 'party of the second part'; and if it was written in Sanskrit, it would be far clearer to my benighted mind than it is in its present lucid form. But I will read it if you

prefer it — even though delirium should supervene."

It was never pleasant to Colonel Tredennis to remember this trivial episode, and the memory of it became a special burden to him as time progressed and he saw more of Amory's methods and tendencies. But it was scarcely for him to go to her, and tell her that her husband was not as practical a business man as he should be, that he was visionary and too easily allured by glitter and speciousness. He could not warn her against him and reveal to her the faults and follies she seemed not to have discovered. But he could revive something of Richard's first fancy for him, and make himself in a measure necessary to him, and perhaps gain an influence over him which might be used to good purpose. Possibly, despite his modesty, he had a half-conscious knowledge of the power of his own strong will and nature over weaker ones, and was resolved that this weak one should be moved by them, if the thing were possible.

Nor was this all. There were other duties he undertook, for reasons best known to himself. He became less of a recluse socially, and presented himself more frequently in the fashionable world. He was no fonder of gaiety than

he had been before, but he faced it with patience and courage. He went to great parties, and made himself generally useful. He talked to matrons who showed a fancy for his company, and was the best and most respectful of listeners; he was courteous and attentive to both chaperones and their charges, and by quietly persistent good conduct won additional laurels upon each occasion of his social appearance. Those who had been wont to stand somewhat in awe of him, finding nothing to fear on more intimate acquaintance, added themselves to the list of his admirers. Before the season was over, he had made many a staunch friend among matronly leaders of fashion, whose word was law. If such a thing could be spoken of a person of habits so grave, it might have been said that he danced attendance upon these ladies; but, though such a phrase would seem unfitting, it may certainly be remarked that he walked attendance on them, and sought their favour and did their bidding with a silent faithfulness wonderful to behold. He accepted their invitations and attended their receptions; he escorted them to their carriages, found their wraps, and carried their light burdens with an imperturbable demeanour.

"What!" said Bertha one night, when she had seen him in attendance on the wife of the Secretary of State, whose liking for him was at once strong and warm, "what! is it Colonel Tredennis who curries the favour of the rich and great? It has seemed so lately! Is there any little thing in foreign missions you desire, or do you think of an Assistant-Secretaryship."

"There is some dissatisfaction expressed with regard to the Minister to the Court of St. James," was his reply. "It is possible that he will be re-called. In that case may I hope to command your influence?"

But, many a time as he carried his shawls, or made his grave bow over the hand of a stately dowager, a half-sad smile crossed his face as he thought of the true reason for his efforts, and realised with a generous pang the depth of his unselfish perfidy. They were all kind to him, and he was grateful for their favours; but he would rather have been in his room at work, or trying to read, or marching up and down, thinking in his solitude. Janey entertained him with far more success than the prettiest *débutante* of the season could hope to attain, though there was no

*débutante* among them who did not think well of him, and admire him not a little. But, the reason which brought him upon this brightly lighted stage of action? Well, there was only one reason for everything now, he knew full well—for his being sadder than usual, or a shade less heavy of heart, for his wearing a darker face or a brighter one, for his interest in society, or his lack of interest in it, for his listening anxiously and being upon the alert. The reason was Bertha. When he heard her name mentioned, he waited in silent anxiety for what followed; when he did not hear it, he felt ill at ease, lest it had been avoided from some special cause.

"What she will not do for herself," he said, "I must try to do for her. If I make friends and win their good opinions, I may use their influence in the future, if the worst should come to the worst, and she should need to be upheld. It is women who sustain women or condemn them. God forbid that she should ever lack their protection!"

And so he worked to earn the power to call upon this protection if it should be required, and performed his part with such steadfastness of purpose, that he made a

place for himself such as few men are fortunate enough to make.

There was one friendship he made in these days, which he felt would not be likely to fade out or diminish in value. It was a friendship for a woman almost old enough to have been his mother—a woman who had seen the world and knew it well, and yet had not lost her faith or charitable kindness of heart. It was the lady whom Bertha had seen him attending when she had asked him what object he had in view—the wife of the Secretary of State, whose first friendly feeling for him had become a most sincere and earnest regard, for which he was profoundly grateful.

"A man to whom such a woman is kind must be grateful," he had said, in speaking of her to Agnes Sylvestre. "A woman who is good and generous, who is keen, yet merciful, whose judgment is ripe, and whose heart is warm, who has the discernment of maturity and the gentleness of youth—it is an honour to know her and be favoured by her. One is better every time one is thrown with her, and leaves her presence with a stronger belief in all good things."

It had perhaps been this lady's affection

for Professor Herrick which had at the outset directed her attention to his favourite; but, an acquaintance once established, there had been no need of any other impetus than she received from her own feminine kindliness, quickness of perception, and sympathy. The interest he awakened in most feminine minds he had at once awakened in her own.

"He looks," she said to herself, "as if he had a story, and hardly knew the depth of its meaning himself."

But, though she was dexterous enough at drawing deductions, and heard much of the small talk of society, she heard no story. He was at once soldier and scholar; he was kind, brave, and generous; men spoke well of him, and women liked him; his past and present entitled him to respect and admiration—but there was no story mentioned in any discussion of him. He seemed to have lived a life singularly uneventful, so far as emotional experiences were concerned.

"Nevertheless," she used to say, when she gave a few moments to sympathetic musing upon him, "nevertheless—"

She observed his good behaviour, notwithstanding he did not enjoy himself greatly

in society. He was attentive to his duties without being absorbed in them, and, when temporarily unoccupied, wore a rather weary and abstracted look.

"It is something like the look," she once remarked inwardly, "*something* like the look I have seen in the eyes of that bright and baffling little Mrs. Amory, who seems at times to be obliged to recall herself from some-where."

She had not been the leader of this world of hers without seeing many things and learning many lessons, and, as she had stood, giving her greeting to the passing multitude week after week, she had gained a wonderful amount of experience and knowledge of her kind. She had seen so many weary faces, so many eager ones, so many stamped with care and disappointment; bright eyes had passed before her which one season had saddened; she had heard gay voices change and soft ones grow hard; she had read of ambitions frustrated and hopes denied, and once or twice had seen with a pang that somewhere a heart had been broken.

Naturally, in thus looking on, she had given some attention to Bertha Amory, and had not been blind to the subtle changes through

which she had passed. She thought she could date the period of these changes. She remembered the reception at which she had first noted that the girlish face had begun to assume a maturer look, and the girlish vivacity had altered its tones. This had happened the year after the marriage, and then Jack had been born, and when society saw the young mother again the change in her seemed almost startling. She looked worn and pale, and showed but little interest in the whirl about her. It was as if suddenly fatigue had overtaken her, and she had neither the energy nor the desire to rally from it. But, before the end of the season she had altered again, and had a touch of too brilliant colour, and was gayer than ever.

"Rather persistently gay," said the older woman. "That is it, I think."

Lately there had been a greater change still and a more baffling one, and there had appeared upon the scene an element so new and strange as to set all ordinary conjecture at nought. The first breath of rumour which had wafted the story of Planefield's infatuation and the Westoria schemes had been met with generous displeasure and disbelief; but, as

time went on, it had begun to be more difficult to make an effort against discussion which grew with each day and gathered material as it passed from one to another. The most trivial circumstance assumed the proportions of proof when viewed in the light of the general too vivacious interest. When Senator Planefield entered a room, people instantly cast about in search of Mrs. Amory, and reposed entire confidence in the immediately popular theory that, but for the presence of the one, the absence of the other would have been a foregone conclusion. If they met each other with any degree of vivacity, the fact was commented upon in significant asides; if Bertha's manner was cold or quiet, it was supposed to form a portion of her deep-laid plan for the entire subjugation of her victim. It had indeed come to this at last, and Tredennis's friend looked on and listened bewildered to find herself shaken in her first disbelief by an aspect of affairs too serious to be regarded with indifference. By the time the season drew towards its close, the rumour, which had at first been accepted only by rumour-lovers and epicures in scandal, had found its way into places where opinion had

weight and decision was a more serious matter. In one or two quiet establishments there was private debating of various rather troublesome questions, in which debates Mrs. Amory's name was frequently mentioned. Affairs as unfortunate as the one under discussion had been known to occur before, and it was not impossible that they might occur again; it was impossible to be blind to them, it was impossible to ignore or treat them lightly, and certainly something was due to society from those who held its reins in their hands for the time being.

"It is too great leniency which makes such things possible," some one remarked. "To a woman with a hitherto unspotted reputation and in an entirely respectable position, they should be impossible."

It was on the very evening that this remark was made that Bertha expressed a rather curious opinion to Laurence Arbuthnot.

"It is dawning upon me," she said, "that I am not quite so popular as I used to be, and I am wondering why."

"What suggested the idea?" Laurence inquired.

"I scarcely know," she replied, a little

languidly, "and I don't care so much as I ought. People don't talk to me in so animated a manner as they used to—or I fancy they don't. I am not very animated myself, perhaps. There is a great deal in that. I know I am deteriorating conversationally. What I say hasn't the right ring exactly, and I suppose people detect the false note, and don't like it. I don't wonder at it. Oh, there is no denying that I am not so much overpraised and noticed as I used to be."

And then she sat silent for some time and appeared to be reflecting, and Laurence watched her with a dawning sense of anxiety he would have been reluctant to admit the existence of, even to himself.

## CHAPTER X.

### Husband and Wife.

A few days after this, she told Richard that she wished to begin to make her arrangements for going away for the summer.

"What, so early!" he exclaimed with an air of some slight discontent. "It has been quite cool so far!"

"I remained too late last year," she answered. "And I want to make up for lost time."

They were at dinner, and he turned his wine-glass about restlessly on the table-cloth.

"Are you getting tired of Washington?" he asked. "You seem to be."

"I am a little tired of everything just now," she said, "even——" with a ghost of a laugh, "of the Westoria lands and Senator Planefield."

He turned his wine-glass about again.

"Oh!" he said, his voice going beyond the borders of petulance, "it is plain enough to see that you have taken an unreasonable dislike to Planefield."

"He is too large and florid, and absorbs too much of one's attention," she replied coldly.

"He does not always seem to absorb a great deal of yours," Richard responded, knitting his delicate, dark brows. "You treated him cavalierly enough last night, when he brought you the roses."

"I am tired of his roses!" she exclaimed with sudden passion. "They are too big and red and heavy! They cost too much money! They fill all the air about me! They weight me down, and I never seem to be rid of them! I won't have any more! Let him give them to some one else!" And she threw her bunch of grapes on her plate, and dropped her forehead on her hands with a childish gesture of fatigue and despair.

Richard knitted his brows again. He regarded her with a feeling very nearly approaching nervous dread. This would not do, it was plain.

"What is the matter with you?" he said. "What has happened? It isn't like *you* to be unreasonable, Bertha."

She made an effort to recover herself, and partly succeeded. She lifted her face and spoke quite gently and deprecatingly.

"No," she said. "I don't think it is; so you will be all the readier to overlook it, and allow it to me as a luxury. The fact is, Richard, I am not growing any stronger, and——"

"Do you know," he interrupted, "I don't understand that. You used to be strong enough."

"One has to be very strong to be strong *enough*," she replied, "and I seem to have fallen a little short of the mark."

"But it has been going on rather a long time, hasn't it?" he inquired. "Didn't it begin last winter?"

"Yes," she answered in a low voice, "it *began* then."

"Well, you see, that is rather long for a thing of that sort to go on without any special reason."

"It has seemed so to me," she responded, without any change of tone.

"Haven't you a pretty good appetite?" he inquired.

She raised her eyes suddenly, and then dropped them again. He had not observed what a dozen other people had seen.

"No," she answered.

"Don't you sleep well?"

"No."

"Are you thinner? Well, yes," giving her a glance of inspection. "You are thinner. Oh! come now, this won't do at all!"

"I am willing to offer any form of apology you like," she said.

"You must get well," he answered, "that is all." And he rose from his seat, went to the mantel for a cigarette, and returned to her side, patting her shoulder encouragingly. "You would not be tired of Planefield, if you were well. You would like him well enough."

The change which settled upon her face was one which had crossed it many a time without his taking note of it. Possibly the edge of susceptibilities so fine and keen as his is more easily dulled than that of sensitiveness less exquisite. She arose herself.

"That offers me an inducement to recover," she said. "I will begin immediately—to-day

—this moment. Let me light your cigarette for you."

After it was done, they sauntered into the library together, and stood for a moment looking out of the window.

"Do you know," she said at length, laying her hand on his sleeve, "I think even you are not quite yourself. Are you an invalid too?"

"I?" he said. "Why do you think so?"

"For a very good reason," she answered. "For the best of reasons. Two or three times lately you have been a trifle out of humour. Are you aware of it? Such, you see, is the disadvantage of being habitually amiable. The slightest variation of your usually angelic demeanour lays you open to the suspicion of bodily ailment. Just now, for instance, at table, when I spoke to you about going away, you were a little—not to put too fine a point upon it—cross."

"Was I?"

Her touch upon his sleeve was very soft and kind, and her face had a gentle, playful appeal on it.

"You really were," she returned. "Just a little—and so was I. It was more a matter of voice and manner, of course, but we didn't

appear to our greatest advantage, I am afraid. And we have never done things like that, you know, and it would be rather bad to begin now, wouldn't it?"

"It certainly would," he replied. "And it is very nice in you to care about it."

"It would not be nice in me not to care," she said. "Just for a moment, you know, it actually sounded quite—quite married. It seemed as if we were on the verge of agreeing to differ about—Senator Planefield."

"We won't do it again," he said. "We will agree to make the best of him."

She hesitated a second.

"I will try not to make the worst," she returned. "There is always a best, I suppose. And so long as you are here to take care of me, I need not—need not be uncomfortable."

"About what?" he asked.

She hesitated again, and a shade of new colour touched her cheek.

"I don't think I am over fastidious," she said, "but he has a way I don't like. He is too fulsome. He admires me too much. He pays me too many compliments. I wish he would not do it."

"Oh! come, now," he said gaily, "that *is* prejudice! It is worse than all the rest. I

never heard you complain of your admirers before, or of their compliments."

She hesitated a moment again. It was not the first time she had encountered this light and graceful obstinacy, and found it more difficult to cope with than words apparently more serious.

"I have never had an admirer of exactly that quality before," she said.

"Oh!" he said, airily, "don't argue from the ground that it is a bad quality."

"Has it never struck you," she suggested, "that there is something of the same quality, whether it is good, bad, or indifferent, in all the persons who are connected with the Westoria lands? I have felt once or twice lately, when I have looked around the parlours, as if I must suddenly have emigrated, the atmosphere was so different. They have actually rather crowded out the rest—those men."

It was his turn to pause now, and he did so, looking out of the window evidently ill at ease, and hesitant for the moment.

"My dear child," he said, at length, "there may be truth in what you say; but—I may as well be frank with you—the thing is necessary."

"Richard," she said quickly, prompted to

the question by a sudden, vague thought, "what have *you* to do with the Westoria lands? Why do you care so much about them?"

"I have everything to do with them—and nothing," he answered. "The legal business connected with them, and likely to result from the success of the scheme, will be the making of me, that is all. I haven't been an immense success so far, you know, and it will make me an immense success and a man of property. Upon my word, a nice little lobbyist *you* are, to look frightened at the mere shadow of a plot!"

"I am not a lobbyist," she exclaimed. "I never wanted to be one! That was only a part of the nonsense I have talked all my life. I have talked too much nonsense. I wish—I wish I had been different!"

"Don't allow your repentance to be too deep," he remarked dryly. "You won't be able to get over it."

"It is too late for repentance; but I shall not be guilty of that particular kind of folly again. It was folly—and it was bad taste—"

"As I had not observed it, you might have been content to let it rest," he interrupted.

She checked herself in the reply she was about to make, clasping her hands helplessly.

"Oh, Richard!" she said, "we are beginning again!"

"So we are," he responded, coolly; "we seem to have a tendency in that direction."

"And it always happens," she said, "when I speak of Senator Planefield, or of going away."

"You have fallen into the habit of wanting to go away lately," he answered. "You wanted to go to Europe ——"

"I want to go still," she interposed, "very much."

"And I wish you to remain here," he returned petulantly. "What is the use of a man's having a wife at the other side of the globe?"

She withdrew a pace and leaned against the side of the window, letting her eyes rest upon him with a little, bitter smile. For the moment she had less care of herself and of him than she had ever had before.

"Ah!" she said, "then you keep me here because you love me?"

"Bertha!" he exclaimed.

Even his equable triviality found a disturbing element in the situation.

"Richard," she said, "go and finish your cigarette out of doors. It will be better for both of us. This has gone far enough."

"It has gone too far," he answered nervously. "It is deucedly uncomfortable, and it isn't our way to be uncomfortable. Can't we make it smooth again? Of course we can! It would not be like you to be implacable. I am afraid I was a trifle irritable. The fact is, I have had a great deal of business anxiety lately—one or two investments have turned out poorly—and it has weighed on my mind. If the money were mine, you know—but it is yours ——"

"I have never wished you to feel the difference," she said.

"No," he replied. "Nothing could have been nicer than your way about it. You might have made me very uncomfortable, if you had been a hard, business-like creature; but, instead of that, you have been charming."

"I am glad of that," she said, and she smiled gently as he put his arm about her, and kissed her cheek.

"You have a right to your caprices," he said. "Go to your summer haunts of vice and fashion, if you wish to, and I will follow you as soon as I can; but we won't say any more about Europe, just at present, will we? Perhaps next year."

And he kissed her again.

"Perhaps next year or the year after," she repeated, with a queer little smile. "And—and we will take Senator Planefield with us."

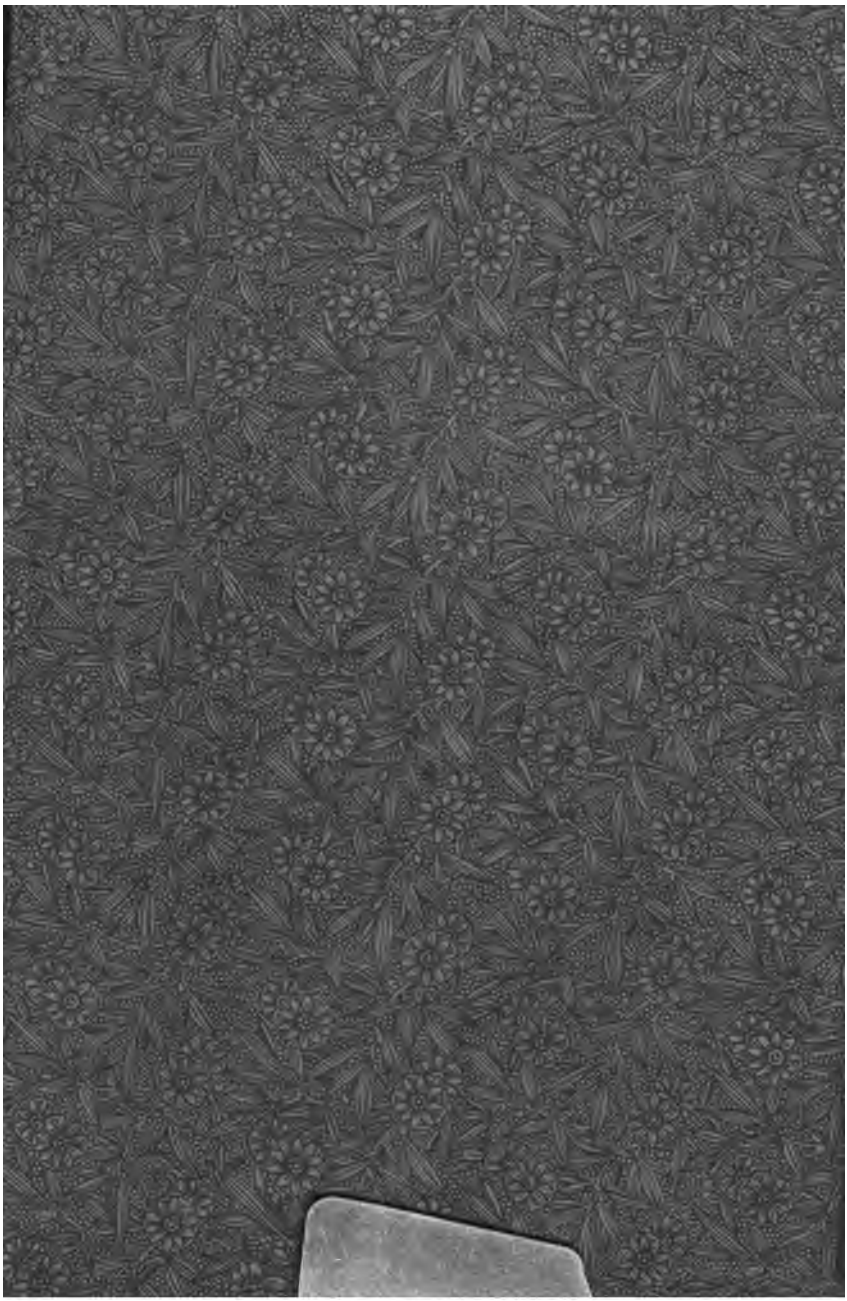
"No," he answered, "we will leave him at home to invest the millions derived from the Westoria lands."

And he went out with a laugh on his lips.

A week later Colonel Tredennis heard from Richard that Bertha and the children were going away.

"When?" asked the Colonel. "That seems rather sudden. I saw Janey two days ago, and did not understand that the time was set for their departure."

"It is rather sudden," said Richard. "The fact is, they leave Washington this morning. I should be with them now if it were not for a business engagement."

END OF VOL. II.

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